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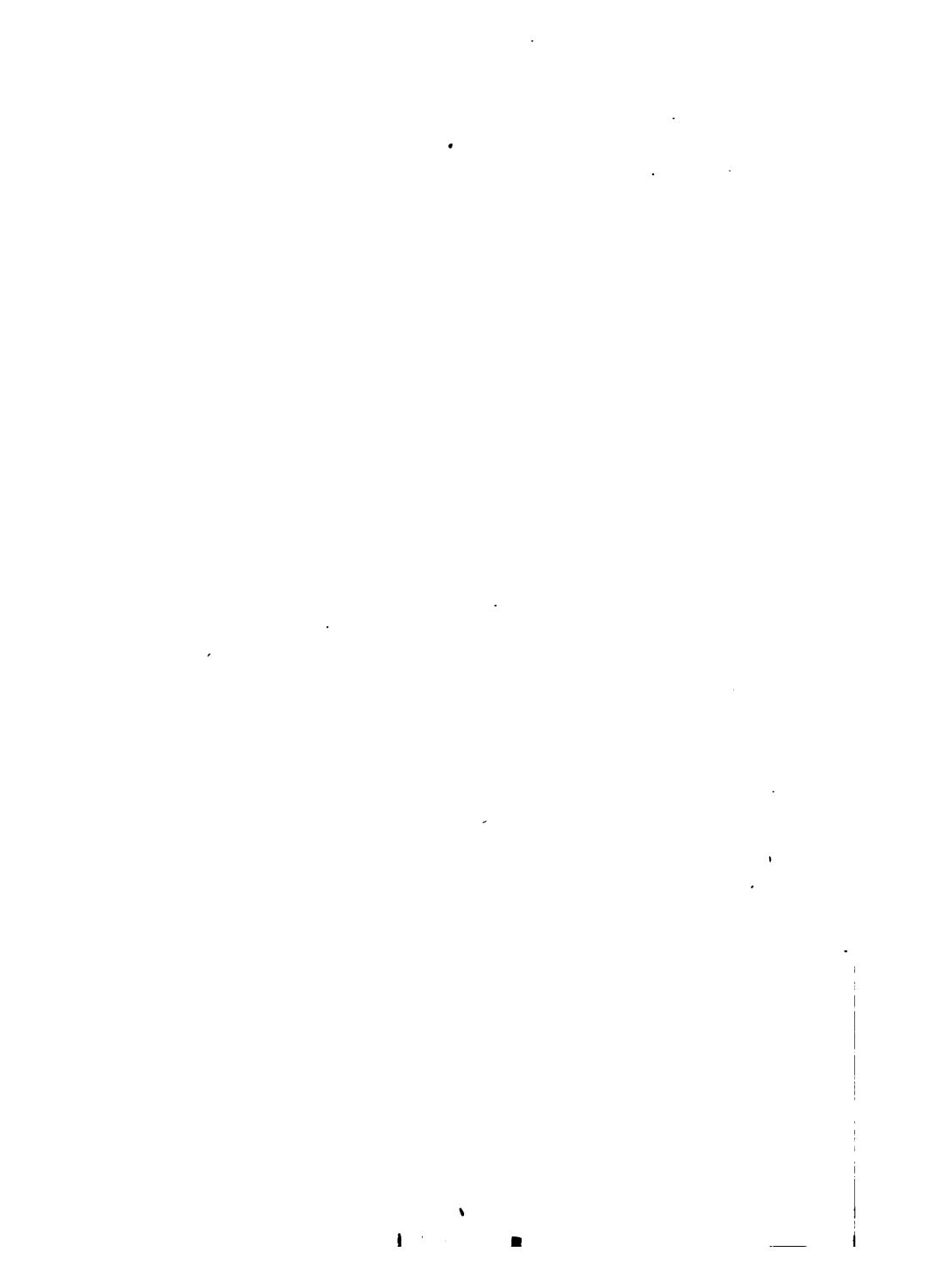




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**THE  
VICISSITUDES OF BESSIE FAIRFAX.**

**PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY  
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THE VICISSITUDES  
OF  
BESSIE FAIRFAX.

BY  
HOLME LEE,  
AUTHOR OF  
BASIL GODFREY'S CAPRICE," "THE BEAUTIFUL MISS BARRINGTON,"  
"KATHERINE'S TRIAL," ETC. ETC.

"Not what we could wish, but what we must even put up with."

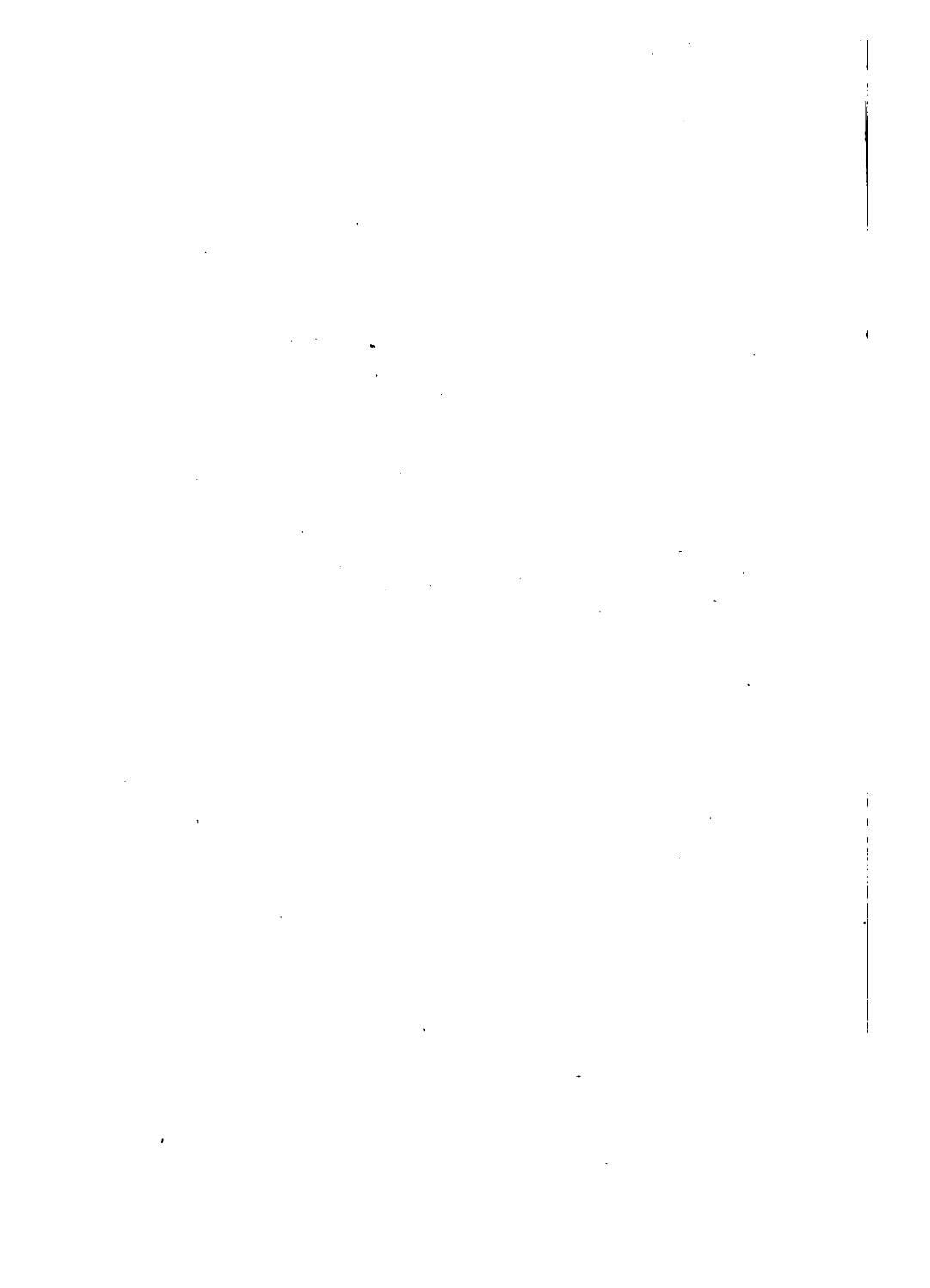
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THE  
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CHAPTER I.

BESSION'S BRINGING HOME.

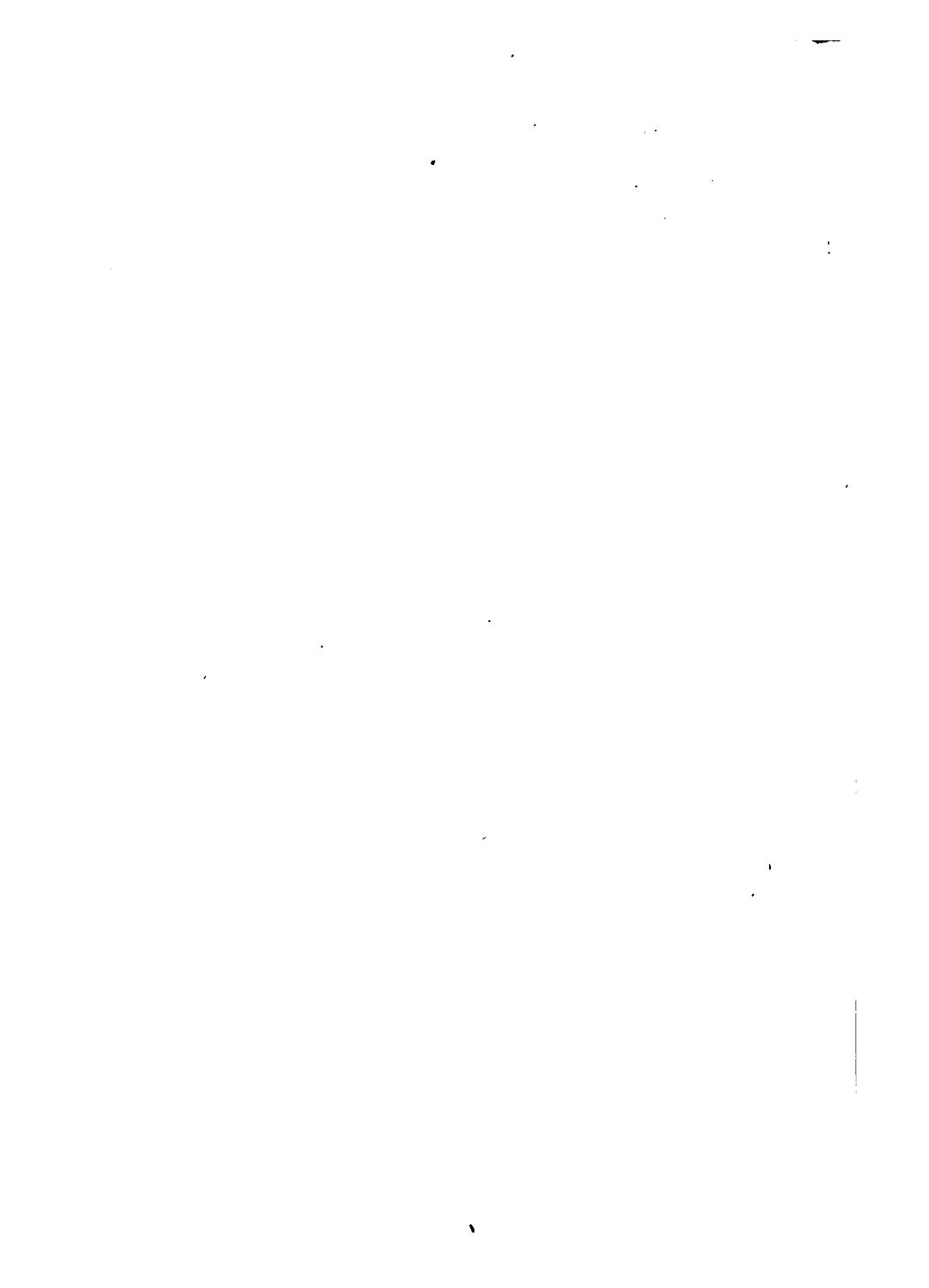
WHEN Bessie Fairfax realised that the yacht was sailing away from Ryde not to return, and carrying her quite out of reach of pursuit, her spirits sank to zero. It was a perfect evening, and the light on the water was lovely, but to her it was a most melancholy view—when she could see it for the mist that obscured her vision. All her heart desired was being left further and further behind, and attraction there was none in Woldshire to which she was going. She looked at her Uncle Frederick, silent, absent, sad; she remembered



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confectioner's they were passing, and have a cup of tea.

"My father is as full of this election as if he were going to contest the city of Normminster himself," said he. "I hope you have a blue bonnet? you will have to play your part. Beautiful ladies are of great service in these affairs."

Bessie had not a blue bonnet—her bonnet was white chip and pink may—the enemy's colours. She must put it by till the end of the war. Tea and thick bread and butter were supplied to the hungry couple, and about four o'clock Mr Fairfax called for them, and hurried them off to the train. Mr Laurence went on to Normminster, dropping the Squire and Elizabeth at Mitford Junction. Thence they had a drive of four miles through a country of long-backed, rounded hills, ripening cornfields, and meadows green with the rich aftermath and full of cattle. The sky above was high and clear, the air had a

crispness that was exhilarating. The sun set in scarlet splendour, and the reflection of its glory was shed over the low levels of lawn, garden and copse, which, lying on either side of a shallow, devious river, kept still the name of Abbotsmead that had belonged to them before the great monastery at Kirkham was dissolved.

Mr Fairfax was in good-humour now, and recovered from his momentary loss of self-possession at the sight of his granddaughter so thoroughly grown-up. Also election business at Normminster was going as he would have it; and bowling smoothly along in the quiet, early evening, he had time to think of Elizabeth, sitting bolt upright in the carriage beside him. She had a pretty pensive air, for which he saw no cause—only the excitement of novelty staved off depression; and in his sarcastic vein, with doubtful compliment, he said: “I did not expect to see you grown so tall, Elizabeth. You look as healthy as a milk maid.”

She was very quick and sensitive of feeling. She understood him perfectly, and replied that she *was* as healthy as a milk maid. Then she reverted to her wistful contemplation of the landscape, and tried to think of that and not of herself, which was too pathetic.

This country was not so lovely as the Forest. It had only the beauty of high culture. Human habitations were too wide scattered, and the trees—there were no very great trees, nor any blue glimpses of the sea. Nevertheless, when the carriage turned into the domain at a pretty rustic lodge, the overarching gloom of an avenue of limes won Bessie's admiration, and a few fir-trees standing in single grace near the ruins of the abbey which they had to pass on their way to the house, she found almost worthy to be compared with the centenarians of the Forest. The western sun was still upon the house itself. The dusk-tiled mansard roof, pierced by two rows of twinkling dormers, and crowned by solid chimney-

stacks, bulked vast and shapely against the primrose sky, and the stone-shafted lower windows caught many a fiery reflection in their blackness. Through a porch, broad and deep, and furnished with oaken seats, Bessie preceded her grandfather into a lofty and spacious hall, where the foot rang on the bare, polished boards, and ten generations of Fairfaxes, successive dwellers in the grand old house, looked down from the walls. It was not lighted except by the sunset, which filled it with a warm and solemn glow.

Numerous servants appeared: amongst them a plump functionary in blue satinette and a towering cap who curtseyed to Elizabeth, and spoke some words of real welcome. "I'm right glad to see you back, Miss Fairfax! these arms were the first that held you!" Bessie's impulse was to fall on the neck of this kindly personage with kisses and tears, but her grandfather's cool tone intervening maintained her reserve.

"Your young mistress will be pleased to go to her room, Macky. Your reminiscences will keep till to-morrow."

Macky, instantly obedient, begged Miss Fairfax to "come this way," and conducted her through a double-leaved door that stood open to the inner hall, carpetted with crimson pile, like the wide shallow stairs that went up to the gallery surrounding the greater hall. On this gallery opened many doors of chambers long silent and deserted.

"The master ordered you the white suite," announced Macky, ushering Elizabeth into the room so called. "It has pretty prospects, and the rooms are not such wildernesses as the other state-apartments. The eldest unmarried lady of the family always occupied the white suite."

A narrow ante-room, a sitting-room, a bedroom, and off it a sleeping-closet for her maid —this was the private lodging accorded to the new daughter of the house. Bessie gazed

about, taking in a general impression of faded, delicate richness, of white and gold and sparse colour, in elegant, antiquated taste, like a boudoir in an old Norman chateau that she had visited.

“Mrs Betts was so thoughtful as to come on by an earlier train to get unpacked, and warn us to be prepared,” Macky observed in a respectful explanatory tone, and then she went on to offer her good wishes to the young lady she had nursed, in the manner of an old and trusted dependent of the family. “It is fine weather and a fine time of year, and we hope and pray all of us, Miss Fairfax, as this will be a blessed bringing home for you and our dear master. Most of us was here, servants, when Mr Geoffrey, your father, went south. A cheerful, pleasant gentleman he was, and your mamma as pleasant a lady. And here is Mrs Betts to wait on you”—

Bessie thanked the old woman, and would have bidden her remain and talk on about

her forgotten parents, but Macky with another curtsey retired, and Mrs Betts, calm and peremptory, proceeded to array her young lady in her prize-day muslin dress, and sent her hastily downstairs under the guidance of a little page who loitered in the gallery. At the foot of the stairs a lean grey-headed man in black received her, and ushered her into a beautiful octagon-shaped room, all garnished with books and brilliant with light, where her grandfather was waiting to conduct her to dinner. So much ceremony made Bessie feel as if she was acting a part in a play. Since Macky's kind greeting her spirits had risen, and her countenance had cleared marvellously.

Mr Fairfax was standing opposite the door when she appeared. "Good God, it is Dolly!" he exclaimed, visibly startled. Dolly was his sister Dorothy, long since dead. Not only in face and figure, but in a certain lightness of movement, and a buoyant swift way of stepping towards him, Elizabeth recalled her. Per-

haps there was something in the simplicity of her dress too—there on the wall was a pretty miniature of her great-aunt in blue and white and golden flowing hair to witness the resemblance. Mr Fairfax pointed it out to his granddaughter, and then they went to dinner.

It was a very formal ceremonial and rather tedious to the newly emancipated school-girl. Jonquil served his master when he was alone, but this evening he was reinforced by a footman in blue and silver, by way of honour to the young lady. Elizabeth faced her grandfather across a round table. A bowl-shaped chandelier holding twelve wax-lights hung from the groined ceiling above the rose-decked *épergne*, making a bright oasis in the centre of a room gloomy rather from the darkness of its fittings than from the insufficiency of illumination. Under the soft lustre the plate, precious for its antique beauty, the quaint cut glass and old blue china enriched with gold were displayed to perfection. Bessie had a

taste, her eye was gratified, there was repose in all this splendour. But still she felt that odd sensation of acting in a comedy which would be over as soon as the lights were out. Suddenly she recollect ed the bare board in the *Rue St Jean*, the coarse white platters, the hunches of sour bread, the lenten soup, the flavourless *bouilli*, and sighed—sighed audibly, and when her grandfather asked her why that mournful sound, she told him. Her courage never forsook her long.

“It has done you no harm to sup your share of spartan broth; hard living is good for us young,” was the Squire’s comment. “You never complained—your dry little letters always confessed to excellent health. When I was at school we fed roughly. The joints were cut into lumps which had all their names, and we were in honour bound not to pick and choose, but to strike with the fork and take what came up.”

“Of course,” said Bessie, pricked in her

pride and conscience lest she should seem to be weakly complaining now: "Of course, we had treats sometimes. On Madame's birthday we had a glass of white wine at dinner, which was roast veal and pancakes. And on our own birthdays we might have *galette* with sugar, if we liked to give Margotin the money."

"I trust the whole school had *galette* with sugar on your birthday, Elizabeth?" said her grandfather, quietly amused. He was relieved to find her younger, more child-like in her ideas than her first appearance gave him hopes of. His manner relaxed; his tone became indulgent. When she smiled with a blush she was his sweet sister Dolly; when her countenance fell grave again she was the shy, touehy, uncertain little girl who had gone to Fairfield on their first acquaintance so sorely against her inclination. After Jonquil and his assistant retired, Elizabeth was invited to tell how the time had passed on board the *Foam*.

"Pleasantly, on the whole," she said.  
"The weather was so fine that we were on deck from morning till night, and often far on into the night when the moon shone. It was delightful cruising off the Isle of Wight—only I had an immense disappointment there."

"What was that?" Mr Fairfax asked, though he had a shrewd guess.

"I did not remember how easy it is to send a letter—not being used to write without leave—and I trusted Mr Wiley whom I met on Ryde pier going straight back to Beechhurst, with a message to them at home, which he forgot to deliver. And though I did write after, it was too late; for we left Ryde the same day. So I lost the opportunity of seeing my father and mother. It was a pity because we were so near; and I was all the more sorry because it was my own fault."

Mr Fairfax was silent for a few minutes after this bold confession. He had interdicted any communication with the Forest, as

Mr Carnegie prevised. He did not, however, consider it necessary to provoke Bessie's ire, by telling her that he was responsible for her immense disappointment. He let that pass, and when he spoke again it was to draw her out on the more important subject of what progress Mr Cecil Burleigh had made in her interest. It was truly vexatious, but as Bessie told her simple tale, she was conscious that her colour rose and deepened slowly to a burning blush. Why? She vehemently assured herself that she did not care a straw for Mr Cecil Burleigh, that she disliked him rather than otherwise, yet at the mere sound of his name she blushed. Perhaps it was because she dreaded lest anybody should suspect the mistake her vanity had made before. Her grandfather gave her one acute glance, and was satisfied that this business also went well.

"Mr Cecil Burleigh left the yacht at Ryde. It was the first day of the regatta when we

anchored there, and we landed and saw the town," was all Bessie said in words ; but her self-betrayal was eloquent.

" We—what do you mean by *we* ? Did your Uncle Frederick land ? " asked the Squire, not caring in the least to know.

" No—only Mr Cecil Burleigh and myself. We went to the house of some friends of his where we had lunch ; and afterwards Mrs Gardiner and one of the young ladies took me to the Arcade. My uncle never landed at all from the day we left Caen till we arrived at Scarcliffe. Mrs Betts went into Harwich with me—that is a very quaint old town ; but nothing in England looks so battered and decayed as the French cities do."

Mr Fairfax knew all about Miss Julia Gardiner, and Elizabeth's information that Mr Cecil Burleigh had called on the family in Ryde caused him to reflect. It was very imprudent to take Elizabeth with him, very imprudent, indeed ; of course, the Squire

could not know how little he was to blame. To take her mind off the incident that seriously annoyed himself, he asked what troubles Caen had seen, and Bessie, thankful to discourse of something not confusing, answered him like a book.

"Oh, many ! It is very impoverished and dilapidated. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes ruined its trade. Its principal merchants were Huguenots—there are still amongst the best families some of the reformed religion. Then in the great Revolution it suffered again ; the churches were desecrated, and turned to all manner of common uses ; some are being restored, but I myself have seen straw hoisted in at a church window, beautiful with flamboyant tracery in the arch, the shafts below being partly broken away."

Mr Fairfax remarked that France was too prone to violent remedies ; then reverting to the subjects uppermost in his thoughts,

he said : " Elections and politics cannot have much interest for you yet, Elizabeth ; but probably you have heard that Mr Cecil Burleigh is going to stand for Normminster ? "

" Yes—he spoke of it to my Uncle Frederick. He is a very liberal conservative from what I heard him say. There was a famous contest for Hampton when I was not more than twelve years old—we went to see the members chaired. My father was orange—the Carnegies are almost radicals,—they supported Mr Hiloe—and we wore orange rosettes."

" A most unbecoming colour ! You must take up with blue now—blue is the only wear for a Fairfax ! Most men might wear motley for a sign of their convictions. Let us return to the octagon-parlour—it is cheerful with a fire after dinner. At Abbotsmead there are not many evenings when a fire is not acceptable at dusk."

The fire was very acceptable, it was very

composing and pleasant. Bright flashes of flame kindled and reddened the fragrant dry pine chips, and played about the lightly piled logs. Mr Fairfax took his own commodious chair on one side of the hearth facing the uncurtained windows ; a low seat confronted him for Bessie. Both were inclined to be silent, for both were full of thought. The rich colour and gilding of the volumes that filled the dwarf book-cases caught the glow, as did innumerable pretty objects besides—water-colour drawings on the walls, mirrors that reflected the landscape outside, statuettes in shrines of crimson fluted silk—but the prettiest object by far in this dainty lady's chamber was still Bessie Fairfax, in her white raiment, and rippled, shining hair.

This was her grandfather's reflection, and again that impulse to love her that he had felt at Beechhurst long ago began to sway his feelings. It was on the cards that he might become to her a most indulgent, fond

old man ; but then Elizabeth must be submissive, and do his will in great things, if he allowed her to rule in small. Bessie had dropt her mask, and showed her bright face, at peace for the moment ; but it was shadowed again by the resurrection of all her wrongs when her grandfather said on bidding her good-night : “ Perhaps, Elizabeth, the assurance that will tend most to promote your comfort at Abbotsmead to begin with, is that you have a perfect right to be here.”

Her astonishment was too genuine to be hidden. Did her grandfather imagine that she was flattered by her domicile in his grand house ? It was exile to her quite as much as the old school at Caen ! Nothing had ever occurred to shake her original conviction that she was cruelly used in being separated from her friends in the Forest. *They* were her family—not these strangers. Bessie dropped him her embarrassed school-girl’s curtsey, and said : “ Good-night, sir”—not even a thank-

you ! Mr Fairfax thought her manner abrupt, but he did not know the depth and tenacity of her resentment ; or he would have recognised the blunder he had committed in bringing her into Woldshire with unsatisfied longings after old, familiar scenes.

Bessie was of a thoroughly healthy nature, and warmly affectionate. She felt very lonely and unfriended—she wished that her grandfather had said he was glad to have her at Abbotsmead instead of telling her that she had a *right* to be there—but she was also very tired ; and sleep soon prevailed over both sweet and bitter fancies. Premature resolutions she made none—she had been warned against them by Madame Fournier as mischievous impediments to making the best of life—which is so much less often “ what we could wish than what we must even put up with.”

## CHAPTER II.

### THE NEXT MORNING.

PERPLEXITIES and distressed feelings notwithstanding, Bessie Fairfax awoke at an early hour perfectly rested and refreshed. In the east the sun was rising in glory. A soft, bluish haze hung about the woods, a thick dew whitened the grass. She rose to look out of the window.

"It is going to be a lovely day," she said, and coiled herself in a cushioned chair to watch the dawn advancing.

All the world was hushed and silent yet. Slowly the light spread over the gardens, over the meadows and cornfields, chasing away the shadows and revealing the hues of shrub and flower. A reach of the river stole into view, and the red roof of an old mill on its

banks. Then there was a musical, monotonous, reiterated call not far off which roused the cattle, and brought them wending leisurely towards the milking shed. The crowing of cocks near and more remote, the chirping of little birds under the eaves began and increased. A labourer, then another, on their way to work, passed within sight along a field-path leading to the mill; a troop of reapers came by the same road. Then there was the pleasant sound of sharpening a scythe, and Bessie saw a gardener on the lawn stoop to his task.

She returned to her pillow and slept again, until she was awakened by somebody coming to her bedside. It was Mrs Betts, bearing in her hands one of those elegant china services for a solitary cup of tea which have popularised that indulgence amongst ladies.

“What is it?” Bessie asked, gazing with a puzzled air at the tiny turquoise-blue vessels.  
“Tea? I am going to get up to breakfast.”

"Certainly, Miss, I hope so. But it is a custom with many young ladies to have a cup of tea before dressing."

"I will touch my bell if I want anything. No—no tea, thank you," responded Bessie; and the waiting-woman felt herself dismissed. Bessie chose to make and unmake her toilette alone. It was easy to see that her education had not been that of a young lady of quality, for she was quite independent of her maid; but Mrs Betts was a woman of experience, and made allowance for her, convinced that, give her time, she would be helpless and exacting enough.

Mr Fairfax and his granddaughter met in the inner hall with a polite "Good-morning." Elizabeth looked shyly proud, but sweet as a dewy rose. The door of communication with the great hall was thrown wide open. It was all in cool shade, redolent of fresh air and the perfume of flowers. Jonquil waited to usher them to breakfast, which was

laid in the room where they had dined last night.

Mr Fairfax was never a talker, but he made an effort on behalf of Bessie, with whom it was apparently good-manners not to speak until she was spoken to. "What will you do, Elizabeth, by way of making acquaintance with your home? Will you have Macky with her legends of family history, and go over the house, or will you take a turn outside with me, and visit the stables?"

Bessie knew which it was her duty to prefer, and fortunately her duty tallied with her inclination; her countenance beamed, and she said: "I will go out with you, if you please."

"You ride, I know. There is a nice little filly breaking in for you—you must name her, as she is to be yours."

"May I call her Janey?"

"Janey—was that the name of Mr Carnegie's little mare?"

"No; she was Miss Hoyden. Janey was

the name of my first friend at school. She went away soon, and I have never heard of her since. But I shall—I often think of her."

" You have a constant memory, Elizabeth—not the best memory for your happiness. What are you eating? Only bread and butter. Will you have no sardines, bacon, eggs, honey? Nothing! A very abstemious young lady! You have done with school, and may wean yourself from school-fare."

Breakfast over, Mrs Betts brought her young lady's Leghorn hat, and a pair of new Limerick gauntlet-gloves—nice enough for Sunday in Bessie's modest opinion, but as they were presented for common wear, she put them on, and said nothing. Mr Fairfax conducted his granddaughter to his private room which had a lobby and porch into the garden, and twenty paces along the wall a door into the stable-yard. The groom who had the nice little filly in charge to train was just bringing her out of her stable.

"There is your Janey, Elizabeth," said her grandfather.

"Oh, what a darling!" cried Bessie in a voice that pleased him, as the pretty creature began to dance and prance and sidle and show off her restive caprices, making the groom's mounting her for some minutes impracticable.

"It is only her play, Miss, she ain't no vice at all," the man said, pleading her excuses. "She'll be as dossil as dossil can be when I've give her a gallop. But this is her of a morning—so fresh there's no holding her."

Another groom had come to aid, and at length the first was seated firm in the saddle, with a flowing skirt to mimic the lady that Janey was to carry. And with a good deal of manœuvring they got safe out of the yard.

"You would like to follow, and see—come then," said the Squire, and led Bessie by a short cut across the gardens to the park. Janey was flying like the wind over the level

turf, but she was well under guidance, and when her rider brought her round to the spot where Mr Fairfax and the young lady stood to watch, she quite bore out his encomium on her docility. She allowed Bessie to stroke her neck, and even took from her hand an apple which the groom produced from a private store of encouragement and reward in his pocket.

"It will be well to give her a good breathing before Miss Fairfax mounts her, Ranby," said his master, walking round her approvingly. Then to Bessie he said: "Do you know enough of horses not to count rashness courage, Elizabeth?"

"I am ready to take your word or Ranby's for what is venturesome," was Bessie's moderate reply. "My father taught me to ride as soon as I could sit, so that I have no fear. But I am out of practice, for I have never ridden since I went to Caen."

"You must have a new habit—you shall

have a heavy one for the winter, and ride to the Meet with me occasionally. I suppose you have never done that?"

"Mr Musgrave once took me to see the hounds throw off. I rode Harry's pony that day. I was staying at Brook for a week."

Mr Fairfax knew who "Mr Musgrave" was and who "Harry" was, but Bessie did not recollect that he knew. However, as he asked no explanation of them, she volunteered none, and they returned to the gardens.

The cultivated grounds of Abbotsmead extended round three sides of the house. On the west, where the principal entrance was, an outer semi-circle of lime-trees, formed by the extension of the avenue, enclosed a belt of evergreens, and in the middle of the drive rose a mound over which spread a magnificent cedar. The great hall was the central portion of the building, lighted by two lofty, square-headed windows on either side of the door; the advanced wings that flanked it, had

corresponding bays of exquisite proportions, which were the end windows of the great drawing-room and the old banqueting-room. The former was continued along the south with one bay very wide and deep, and on either side of it a smaller bay, all preserving their dim glazing after the old Venetian pattern. Beyond the drawing-room was the modern adaptation of the wing which contained the octagon-parlour and dining-room —from the outside the harmony of construction was not disturbed. The library adjoined the banqueting-room on the north, and overlooked a fine expanse where the naturalisation of American trees and shrubs had been the hobby of the Fairfaxes for more than one generation. The flower-garden was formed in terraces on the south, and was a mixture of Italian and old English taste. The walls were a mingled tapestry of roses, jessamine, sweet clematis, and all climbing plants hardy enough to bear the rigours of the northern

winter. Trimmed in though ever so closely in the fall of the year, in the summer it bushed and blossomed out into a wantonly luxuriant, delicious variety of colour and fragrance. If here and there a bit of grey stone showed through the mass, it seemed only to enhance the loveliness of the leaf and flower-work.

Bessie Fairfax stood to admire its glowing intricacy, and with a remarkable effort of candour exclaimed : “ I think this is as pretty as anything in the Forest—as pretty as Fairfield, or the Manor House at Brook ! ” which amused her grandfather ; for the south front of the old mansion-house of Abbotsmead was one of the most grandly picturesque specimens of domestic architecture to be found in the kingdom.

In such perambulations time slips away fast. The Squire looked at his watch. It was eleven o’clock ; at half-past he was due at a magistrate’s meeting two miles off—he

must leave Bessie to amuse herself until luncheon at two. Bessie was contented to be left. She replied that she would now go indoors, and write to her mother. Her grandfather paused an instant on her answer, then nodded acquiescence, and went away in haste. Was he disappointed that she said nothing spontaneous ? Bessie did not give that a thought, but she said in her letter : " I do believe that my grandfather wishes me to be happy here " — a possibility which had not struck her until she took a pen in her hand, and set about reflecting what news she had to communicate to her dear friends at Beechhurst. This brilliant era of her vicissitudes was undoubtedly begun with a little aversion.

In the absence of her young lady, Mrs Betts had unpacked and carefully disposed of Bessie's limited possessions.

"Your wardrobe will not give me much trouble, Miss," said the waiting-woman, with

sly, good-humoured allusion to the extent of it.

"No," answered Bessie, misunderstanding her in perfect simplicity. "You will find all in order. At school we mended our clothes and darned our stockings punctually every week."

"Did you really do this beautiful darning, Miss? It is the finest darning I ever met with—not to say it was lace." Mrs Betts spoke more seriously, as she held up to view a pair of filmy Lille thread stockings which had sustained considerable dilapidation and repair.

"Yes! They were not worth the trouble. Mademoiselle Adelaide made us wear Lille thread on dancing days that we might never want stockings to mend. She had a passion for darning. She taught us to graft also—you will find one pair of black silk grafted toe and heel. I have thought them much too precious ever to wear since. I keep them for a curiosity."

On the tables in Bessie's sitting-room were set out her humble appliances for work, for writing—an enamelled white box with cut steel ornaments, much scratched ; a capacious oval basket with a quilted red silk cover, much faded ; a limp russia-leather blotting-book wrapt in silver paper,—Harry Musgrave had presented it to Bessie on her going into exile, and she had cherished it too dearly to expose it to the risk of blots at school. “ I think,” said she, “ I shall begin to use it now.”

She released it from its envelope, smelt it, and laid it down comfortably in front of the Sevres china inkstand. All the permanent furniture of the writing-table was of Sevres china. Bessie thought it grotesque, and had no notion of the value of it.

“ The big basket may be put aside ? ” suggested Mrs Betts, and her young lady did not gainsay her. But when the shabby little white enamelled box was threatened, she commanded that that should be left—she had had

it so long she could not bear to part with it. It had been the joint-gift of Mr and Mrs Carnegie on her twelfth birthday.

Released, at length, from Mrs Betts' respectful, observant presence, Bessie began to look about her, and consider her new habitation. A sense of exaltation and a sense of bondage possessed her. These pretty, quaint rooms were hers, then ? It was not a day-dream—it was real. She was at Abbotsmead—at Kirkham. Her true home-nest under the eaves at Beechhurst was hundreds of miles away : further still was the melancholy garden in the *Rue St Jean*.

Opposite the parlour window was the fireplace, the lofty mantelshelf being surmounted by a circular mirror, so inclined as to reflect the landscape outside. Upon the panelled walls hung numerous specimens of the elegant industry of Bessie's predecessors—groups of flowers embroidered on tarnished white satin, shepherds and shepherdesses with shell-pink

painted faces and raiment of needlework in many colours; pallid sketches of scenery, crayon portraits of youths and maidens of past generations, none younger than fifty years ago. There was a book-case of white wood ruled with gold lines, like the spindly chairs and tables, and here Bessie could study, if she pleased, the literary tastes of ancient ladies, matrons and virgins, long since departed this life in the odour of gentility and sanctity. The volumes were in bindings rich and solid, and the purchase or presentation of each had probably been an event. Bessie took down here and there one—those ladies who spent their graceful leisure at embroidery-frames were students of rather stiff books—Locke “On the Conduct of the Human Understanding” and Paley’s “Evidences of the Christian Religion” Bessie took down and promptly restored; also the Sermons of Dr Barrow and the Essays of Dr Goldsmith. The Letters of Mrs Katherine Talbot and

Mrs Elizabeth Carter engaged her only a few minutes, and the novels of Miss Edgeworth not much longer. The most modern volumes in the collection were inscribed with the name of "Dorothy Fairfax" who reigned in the days of Byron and Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, and had through them (from the contents of three white vellum-covered volumes of extracts in her autograph) learnt to love the elder poets whose works in quarto populated the library. To Bessie, these volumes became a treasure out of which she filled her mind with songs and ballads, lays and lyrics. The third volume had a few blank pages at the end, and these were the last lines in it—

"Absence, hear thou my protestation  
Against thy strength,  
Distance and length ;  
Do what thou canst for alteration :  
For hearts of truest mettle  
Absence doth join, and Time doth settle."

Twice over Bessie read this, then to herself

repeated it aloud—all with thoughts of her friends in the Forest.

The next minute her fortitude gave way, tears rushed to her eyes, Madame Fournier's precepts vanished out of remembrance, and she cried like a child wanting its mother. In which unhappy condition Mrs Betts discovered her, sitting upon the floor, when the little page came flying to announce luncheon and visitors. It was two o'clock already.

## CHAPTER III.

### NEIGHBOURS TO ABBOTSMEAD.

SOME recent duties of Mrs Betts' service had given her, on occasion, an authoritative manner, and she was impelled to use it when she witnessed the forlornness of her young lady. “I am surprised that you should give way, Miss,” said she. “In the middle of the day too, when callers are always liable, and your dear, good grandpapa expects a smiling face. To make your eyes as red as a ferret”—

“Indeed, they are not!” cried Bessie, and rose, and ran to the looking-glass.

Mrs Betts smiled at the effect of her tactics, and persevered. “Let me see, Miss—because if it is plain you have been fretting, you had better make an excuse, and stop upstairs. But the master will be vexed.” Bessie turned,

and submitted her countenance to inspection. “There was never a complexion yet that was improved by fretting,” was the waiting-woman’s severe insinuation. “You must wait five minutes, and let the air from the window blow on you. Really, Miss, you are too old to cry.”

Bessie offered no rejoinder. She was ashamed. The imperative necessity of controlling the tender emotions had been sternly inculcated by Madame Fournier. “Now, shall I do?” she humbly asked, feeling the temperature of her cheeks with her cool hands.

Mrs Betts judiciously hesitated, then, speaking in a milder voice, said, “Yes—perhaps it would not be noticed. But tears was the very mischief for eyes—that Miss Fairfax might take her word for. And it was old Lady Angleby, and her niece, one of the Miss Burleighs, that was downstairs.”

Bessie blushed consciously, appealed to the looking-glass again, adjusted her mind to her

duty, and descended to the octagon-parlour. The rose was no worse for the shower. Mr Fairfax was there, standing with his back to the fire-place, and lending his ears to an argument that was being slowly enunciated by the noble matron who filled his chair. A younger lady, yet not very young, who was seated languidly with her back to the light, acknowledged Bessie's entrance with a smile that invited her approach. "I think," she said, "you know my brother Cecil?" and so they were introduced.

For several minutes yet Lady Angleby's eloquence oozed on (her theme was female emancipation), the Squire listening with an inscrutable countenance: "Now; I hope you feel convinced," was her triumphant conclusion. Mr Fairfax did not say whether he was convinced or not. He seemed to observe that Elizabeth had come in, and begged to present his granddaughter to her ladyship. Elizabeth made her pretty curtsey, and was received

with condescension—and felt, on a sudden, a most unmannerly inclination to laugh, which she dissembled under a girlish animation and alacrity in talk. The Squire was pleased that she manifested none of the stupid shyness of new young lady-hood, though in the presence of one of the most formidable of county magnates. Elizabeth did not know that Lady Angleby was formidable, but she saw that she was immense, and her sense of humour was stirred by the instant perception that her self-consequence was as enormous as her bulk. But Miss Burleigh experienced a thrill of alarm. The possibility of being made fun of by a little simple girl had never suggested itself to the mind of her august relative, but there was always the risk that her native shrewdness might wake up some day from the long torpor induced by the homage paid to her rank, and discover the humiliating fact that she was not always imposing. By good luck for Miss Fairfax's favour with her, Pascal's maxim re-

curred to her memory—that though it is not necessary to respect grand people, it is necessary to bow to them—and her temptation to be merry at Lady Angleby's expense was instantly controlled. Miss Burleigh could not but make a note of her sarcastic humour as a decidedly objectionable, and even dangerous, trait in the young lady's character. That she dissembled it so admirably was, however, to her credit. After his first movement of satisfaction the Squire was himself perplexed—Elizabeth's spirits were lively and capricious—she was joyous-tempered ; but she would not dare to quiz—he must be mistaken ! In fact, she had not yet acquired the suppressed manner and deferential tone to her betters, which are the perpetuation of that ancient rule of etiquette by which inferiors are guarded against affecting to be equal in talk with the mighty. Mr Fairfax proposed rather abruptly to go in to luncheon. Jonquil had announced it five minutes ago.

"She is beautiful! *beautiful!* I am charmed! We shall have her with us—a beautiful young woman would popularise our cause beyond anything. But how would Cecil approve of that?" whispered Lady Angleby as she toiled into the adjoining room with the help of her host's arm.

"Mr Cecil Burleigh is wise and prudent. He will know how to temporise with the vagaries of his womankind," said the Squire. But he was highly gratified by the complimentary appreciation of his granddaughter.

"Vagaries, indeed! The surest signs of sound and healthy progress that have shown themselves in this generation!"

Lady Angleby mounted her hobby. She was that queer modern development, a democrat skin-deep, born and bred in feudal state, clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day, and devoted colloquially to the regeneration of the middle classes. The lower classes might now be trusted to

take care of themselves (with the help of the government and the philanthropists), but such large discovery was being made of frivolity, ignorance, and helplessness amongst the young women of the great intermediate body of the people, that Lady Angleby and a few select friends had determined, looking for the blessing of providence on their endeavours, to take them under their patronage.

“ It is,” she said, “ a most hopeful thing to see the discontent that is stirring amongst young women in this age ; because an essential preliminary to their improvement is the conviction that they have the capacity for a freer, nobler life than that to which they are bound by obsolete domestic traditions. Let us put within the reach of every young girl an education that shall really develop her character and her faculties. Why should the education of girls be arrested at eighteen, and the apprenticeship of their brothers be continued to one-and-twenty ? ” This query was

launched into the air, but Lady Angleby's prominent blue eyes seemed to appeal to Bessie, who was visibly dismayed at the personal nature of the suggestion.

Mr Fairfax smiled and bade her speak ; and then laughing, she said : " Because at eighteen girls tire of grammars and dictionaries, and precepts for the conduct of life. We are women, and want to try life itself."

" And what do you know to fit you for life ? " said Lady Angleby firmly.

" Nothing—except by instinct and precept."

" Exactly so ! And where is your experience ? You have none. Girls plunge into life at eighteen, destitute of experience—weak, foolish, ignorant of men and themselves. No wonder the world is encumbered with so many helpless poor creatures as it is ! "

" I should not like to live with only girls till one-and-twenty. What experience could we teach each other ? " said Bessie, rather at

sea. A notion flashed across her that Lady Angleby might be talking nonsense, but as her grandfather seemed to listen with deference, she could not be sure.

“ Girls ought to be trained in logic, geometry, and physical science, to harden their mental fibre ; and how can they be so trained if their education is to cease at eighteen ? ” Then with a modest tribute to her own undeveloped capacities, the great lady cried : “ Oh, what I might have done if I had enjoyed the advantages I claim for others ! ”

“ You don’t know. You have never been thrown on your own resources,” said Bessie with an air of infinite suggestion.

Lady Angleby stared in cold astonishment, but Bessie preserved her gay self-possession—Lady Angleby’s cold stare was to most persons utterly confusing. Miss Burleigh, an inattentive listener (perhaps because her state of being was all that of a passive listener), gently observed that she had no idea what any of

them would do if they were thrown on their own resources.

“No idea is ever expected from you, Mary,” said her aunt, and turned her stony regard upon the poor lady, causing her to collapse with a silent shiver. Bessie felt indignant. What was this towering old woman, with her theory of feminine freedom, and practice of feminine tyranny? There was a momentary hush, and then Lady Angleby with pompous complacency resumed, addressing the Squire :

“Our large scheme cannot be carried into effect without the general concurrence of the classes we propose to benefit, but our pet plan for proving to what women may be raised demands the concurrence of only a few influential persons. I am sanguine that the Government will yield to our representations, and make us a grant for the foundation of a college to be devoted to their higher education. We ask for twenty thousand pounds.”

“I hope the Government will have more

wit!" Mr Fairfax exclaimed, his rallying tone taking the sting out of his words. "The private hobbies of you noble ladies must be supported out of your private purses, at the expense of more selfish whims"—

"There is nothing so unjust as prejudice, unless it be jealousy," exclaimed Lady Angleby with delicious unreason. "You would keep women in subjection."

Mr Fairfax laughed, and assented to the proposition. "You clamour for the high education of a few at the cost of the many—is that fair?" he continued. "High education is a luxury for those who can afford it—a rich endowment for the small minority who have the power of mind to acquire it; and no more to be provided for that small minority out of the national exchequer than silk attire for our conspicuous beauties."

"I shall never convert you into an advocate for the elevation of the sex! You

sustain the old cry—the inferiority of woman's intellect."

"‘The earth giveth much mould whereof earthen vessels are made, but little dust that gold cometh of.’ High education exists already for the wealthy, and commercial enterprise will increase the means of it as the demand increases. If you see a grain of gold in the dust of common life, and likely to be lost there, rescue it for the crucible—but most such grains of gold find out the way to refine themselves. As for gilding the earthen pots, I take leave to think that it would be labour wasted—that they are, in fact, more serviceable without ornament, plain, well-baked clay. Help those who are helpless, and protect those who are weak as much as you please, but don't vex the strong and capable with idle interference. Leave the middle-classes to supply their wants in their own way—they know them best, and have gumption enough

—and stick we to the ancient custom of providing for the sick and needy.”

“The ancient custom is good, and is not neglected ; but the modern fashion is better.”

“That I contest. There is more alloy of vanity and busybodyism in modern philanthropy than savour of charity.”

“We shall never agree !” cried Lady Angleby with mock despair. “Miss Fairfax, this is the way with us—your grandfather and I never meet but we fall out !”

“You are not much in earnest,” said Bessie. Terrible child ! she had set down this great lady as a great sham.

“To live in the world and to be absolutely truthful is very difficult, is all but impossible,” remarked Miss Burleigh with a mild sententiousness that sounded irrelevant, but came probably in the natural sequence of her unspoken thoughts.

“When you utter maxims like your famous progenitor you should give us his nod too,

Mary," said her aunt. Then suddenly inquired of Mr Fairfax: "When do you expect Cecil?"

"Next week. He must address the electors at Normminster on Thursday. I hope he will arrive here on Tuesday."

Lady Angleby looked full in Bessie's face, which was instantly overspread by a haughty blush. Miss Burleigh looked anywhere else. And both drew the same conclusion—that the young lady's imagination was all on fire, and that her heart would not be slow to yield and melt in the combustion. The next move was back to the octagon-parlour. The young people walked to the open window; the elders had communications to exchange that might or might not concern them, but which they were not invited to hear. They leant on the sill and talked low. Miss Burleigh began the conversation by remarking that Miss Fairfax must find Abbotsmead very strange, being but just escaped from school.

“It is strange—but one grows used to any place very soon,” Bessie answered.

“You have no companion, and Mr Fairfax sets his face against duennas.. What shall you do next week ?”

“What I am bid,” said Bessie laconically. “My grandfather has bespoken for me the good offices of Mrs Stokes as guide to the choice of a blue bonnet—the paramount duty of my life at present seems to be to conform myself to the political views of Mr Cecil Burleigh in the colour of my ribbons. I have great pleasure in doing so, for blue is my colour, and suits me.”

Miss Burleigh had a good heart, and let Bessie’s little bravado pass. “Are you interested in the coming election ? I cannot think of anything else. My brother’s career may almost be said to depend on his success.”

“Then I hope he will win !”

“Your kind good wishes should help him. You will come and stay at Brentwood ?”

"Brentwood? what is Brentwood?"

"My aunt's house. It is only two miles out of Normminster. My aunt was so impatient to see you that she refused to wait one day. Cecil will often be with us; for my father's house is at Carisfort—too far off."

"I am at my grandfather's commands. I have not a friend here. I know no one, and have even to find out the ways and manners of my new world. Do you live at Brentwood?"

"Yes. My home is with my aunt. I shall be glad, very glad to give you any help or direction that you like to ask for. Mrs Stokes has a charming taste in dress, and is a dear little woman. You could not have a nicer friend—and she is well married, which is always an advantage in a girl's friend. You will like Colonel Stokes too."

In the course of the afternoon Bessie had the opportunity of judging for herself. Colonel Stokes brought his wife to call upon her. Their residence was close by Abbotsmead, at

the Abbey Lodge, restored by Mr Fairfax for their occupation. Colonel Stokes was old enough to be his wife's father, and young enough to be her hero and companion. She was a plump little lady, full of spirits and loving-kindness. Bessie considered her and decided that she was of her own age ; but Mrs Stokes had two boys at home to contradict that. She looked so girlish still in her sage matronhood because she was happy, gay, contented with her life, because her eyes were blue and limpid as deep lake water, and her cheeks round and fresh as half-blown roses ungathered. Her dress was as dainty as herself, and merited the eulogium that Miss Burleigh had passed upon it.

“ You are going to be so kind as to introduce me to a good milliner at Normminster ? ” Bessie said after a few polite preliminaries.

“ Yes—to Miss Jocund, who will be delighted to make your acquaintance. I shall tell her to take pains with you—but there will

be no need to tell her that ; she always does take pains with girls who promise to do her credit. I am afraid there is not time to send to Paris for the blue bonnet you must wear next Thursday, but she will make you something nice—you may trust her. This wonderful election is the event of the day. We have resolved that Mr Cecil Burleigh shall head the poll.”

“ How shall you ensure his triumph ? Are you going to canvass for him ? ”

“ No, no, that is out of date ! But Lady Angleby threatens that she will leave Brentwood, and never employ a Norminster tradesman again if they are so ungrateful as to refuse their support to her nephew. They are radicals every one.”

“ And is not she also a radical ? She talks of the emancipation of women by keeping them at school till one-and-twenty, of the elevation of the masses, and the mutual improvement of everybody not in the peerage ”—

" You are making game of her, like my Arthur ! No, she is not a radical—that is all her *hum*. I believe Lord Angleby was something of the sort ; but I don't understand much about politics "—

" Only for the present occasion we are blue ? " said Bessie airily.

" Yes—all blue," echoed Mrs Stokes. " Sky-blue ! " and they both laughed.

" You must agree at what hour you will go into Normminster on Monday—the half-past-eleven train is the best," Colonel Stokes said.

" Cannot we go to-morrow ? " his wife asked.

" No—it is Saturday ; market-day," and his suggestion was adopted.

When the visit was over, in the pleasantness of the late afternoon, Bessie walked through the gardens and across the park with these neighbours to Abbotsmead. A belt of shrubbery and a sunk fence divided the grounds of the Lodge from the park, and there

was easy communication by a rustic bridge and a wicket left on the latch. "I hope you will come often to and fro, and that you will seek me whenever you want me. This is the shortest way," Mrs Stokes said to her. Bessie thanked her, and then walked back to the house, taking her time, and thinking what a long while ago it was since yesterday.

Yesterday ! Only yesterday she was on board the *Foam* that had brought her from France, that had passed by the Forest—no longer ago than yesterday, yet as far off already as a year ago !

Thinking of it she fell into a melancholy that belonged to her character. She was tired with the incidents of the day. At dinner Mr Fairfax seemed to miss something that had charmed him the night before. She answered when he spoke, but her gaiety was under eclipse. They were both relieved when the evening came to an end. Bessie was glad to escape to solitude, and her grandfather

experienced a sense of vague disappointment ; but he supposed he must have patience. Even Jonquil observed the difference, and was sorry that this bright young lady who had come into the house should enter so soon into its clouds ; he was grieved, too, that his dear old master who betrayed an unwonted humility in his desire to please her, should not, at once, find his reward in her affection. Bessie was not conscious that it would have been any boon to him. She had no rule yet to measure the present by except the past, and her experience of his usage in the past did not invite her tenderness. A reasonable and mild behaviour was all she supposed to be required of her. Anything else—whether for better or worse—would be spontaneous. She could not affect either love or dislike, and how far she could dissemble either she had yet to learn.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PAST AND PRESENT.

THE next morning Bessie was left entirely at liberty to amuse herself. Mr Fairfax had breakfasted alone, and was gone to Normminster before she came downstairs. Jonquil made the communication. Bessie wondered whether it was often so, and whether she would have to make out the greater part of the days for herself. But she said nothing ; some feeling that she did not reason about, told her that there must be no complaining here, let the days be what they might. She wrote a long letter to Madame Fournier, and then went out of doors, having declined Mrs Betts' proposed attendance.

“ Where is the village ? ” she asked a boy who was sweeping up fallen leaves from the

still dewy lawn. He pointed her the way to go. "And the church and parsonage ?" she added.

"They be all together, Miss, a piece beyond the Lodge."

With an object in view Bessie could feel interested. She was going to see her mother's home ; the house where she was herself born ; and on the road she began to question whether she had any kinsfolk on her mother's side. Mrs Carnegie had once told her that she believed not—unless there were descendants of her grandfather Bulmer's only brother in America, whither he had emigrated as a young man ; but she had never heard of any. A cousin of some sort would have been most acceptable to Bessie in her dignified isolation. She did not, naturally, love solitude.

The way across the park by which she had been directed brought her out upon the high road—a very pleasant road at that spot, with a fir-wood climbing a shallow hill

opposite, bounded by a low stone fence, all crusted with moss and lichen, age and weather.

For nearly half a mile along the road-side lay an irregular open space of broken ground with fine scattered trees upon it, and close turf where primroses were profuse in spring. An old woman was sitting in the shade, knitting and tending a little black cow that cropped the sweet moist grass. Only for the sake of speaking Bessie asked again her way to the village.

“Keep straight on, Miss, you can’t miss it,” said the old woman, and gazed up at her inquisitively.

So Bessie kept straight on until she came to the ivy-covered walls of the Lodge—the porch opened upon the road, and Colonel Stokes was standing outside in conversation with another gentleman who was the Vicar of Kirkham, Mr Forbes. Bessie went on when she had passed them, shyly disconcerted ; for Colonel Stokes had come forward with an air

of surprise, and had asked her if she was lost. Perhaps it was unusual for young ladies to walk alone here ? She did not know.

The gentlemen watched her out of sight. "Miss Fairfax, of course," said the vicar. "She walks admirably—I like to see that."

"A handsome girl," said Colonel Stokes. And then they reverted to their interrupted discussion,—the approaching election at Norminster. The clergyman was very keen about it, the old Indian officer was almost indifferent.

Meanwhile Bessie reached the church—a very ancient church, spacious and simple, with a square tower and a porch that was called Norman. The graveyard surrounded it. A flagged pathway led from the gate between the grassy mounds to the door, which stood open that the Saturday sun might drive out the damp vapours of the week. She went in and saw white-washed walls ; thick round pillars between the nave and aisles ;

deep-sunken windows dim with fragmentary pieces of coloured glass, and all more or less out of the perpendicular ; a worm-eaten oak-screen separating the chancel and a solemn enclosure, erst a chapel, now the Fairfax pew ; a loft where the choir sat in front for divine service, with fiddle and bassoon, and the school-children sat behind, all under the eye of the parson and the clerk, who was also the school-master.

In the chancel were several monuments to the memory of defunct pastors. The oldest was very old, and the inscription in Latin on brass ; the newest was to Bessie's grandfather—the “Reverend Thomas Bulmer, for forty-six years vicar of this parish.” From the dates he had married late ; for he had died in a good old age in the same year as his daughter Elizabeth, and only two months before her. In smaller letters below the inscription-in-chief, it was recorded that his wife Letitia was buried at Torquay in Cornwall, and that this

monument was erected to their pious memory by their only child—"Elizabeth, the wife of the Reverend Geoffry Fairfax, Rector of Beech-hurst, in the county of Hants."

'All gone—not one left! Bessie pondered over this epitome of family history, and thought within herself that it was not without cause she felt alone here. With a shiver she returned into the sunshine, and proceeded up the public road. The vicarage was a little low house, very humble in its externals, roofed with fluted tiles, and the walls covered to the height of the chamber-windows with green lattice-work and creepers. It stood in a spacious garden and orchard, and had out-buildings at a little distance on the same homely plan. The living was in the gift of Abbots-mead, and the Fairfaxes had not been moved to house their pastor, with his three hundred a year, in a residence fit for a bishop. It was a simple, pleasant, rustic spot. The lower windows were open, so was the door under the

porch. Bessie saw that it could not have undergone any material change since the summer days of twenty years ago, when her father, a bright young fellow, fresh from college, went to read there of a morning with the learned vicar, and fell in love with his pretty Elizabeth, and wooed and won her.

Bessie, imperfectly informed, exaggerated the resentment with which Mr Fairfax had visited his offending son. It was never an active resentment, but merely a contemptuous acceptance of his irrevocable act. He said : “Geoffry has married to his taste. His wife is used to a plain way of living—they will be more useful in a country parish living on so, free from the temptations of superfluous means.” And he gave the young couple a bare pittance. Time might have brought him relenting, but time does not always reserve us opportunities. And here was Bessie Fairfax considering the sorrows and early deaths of her parents, charging them to her grand-

father's account, and confirming herself in her original judgment that he was a hard and cruel man.

The village of Kirkham was a sinuous wide street of homesteads and cottages within gardens, and having a green open border to the road where geese and pigs, cows and children, pastured indiscriminately. It was the old order of things where one man was master. The gardens had, for the most part, a fine show of fragrant flowers, the hedges were neatly trimmed, the fruit-trees were ripening abundantly. Of children, fat and ruddy, clean and well-clothed, there were many playing about, for their mothers were gone to Normminster-market, and there was no school on Saturday. Bessie spoke to nobody, and nobody spoke to her. Some of the children dropt her a curtsey, but the majority only stared at her as a stranger. She felt, somehow, as if she would never be anything else but a stranger here. When she had passed through the village to the end of it,

where the "Chequers," the forge, and the wheelwright's shed stood, she came to a wide common. Looking across it she saw the river, and found her way home by the mill, and the harvest-fields.

It would have enhanced Bessie's pleasure, though not her happiness, perhaps, if she could have betaken herself to building castles in the Woldshire air, but the moment she began to indulge in reverie, her thoughts flew to the Forest. No glamour of pride, enthusiasm, or any sort of delightful hope mistified her imagination as to her real indifference towards Abbotsmead. When she reached the garden, she sat down amongst the roses, and gazed at the beautiful old flower-woven walls that she had admired yesterday, and felt like a visitor growing weary of the place. Even while her bodily eyes were upon it, her mind's eye was filled with a vision of the green slopes of the wilderness garden at Brook and the beeches laying their shadows in the sweet running water.

"I believe I am home-sick," she said. "I cannot care for this place. I should have had a better chance of taking to it kindly if my grandfather had let me go home for a little while. Everything is an effort here." And it is to be feared that she gave way again, and fretted in a manner that Madame Fournier would have grieved to see. But there was no help for it—her heart was sore, and tears relieved it.

Mr Fairfax was at home to dinner. He returned from Normminster jaded and out of spirits. Now Bessie, though she did not love him (though she felt it a duty to assert and re-assert that fact to herself lest she should forget it), felt oddly pained when she looked into his face, and saw that he was dull : to be dull signified to be unhappy in Bessie's vocabulary. But timidity tied her tongue. It was not until Jonquil had left them to themselves that they attempted any conversation. Then

Mr Fairfax remarked : “ You have been making a tour of investigation, Elizabeth : you have been into the village ? ”

Bessie said that she had, and that she had gone into the church. Then all at once an impulse came upon her to ask : “ Why did you let my parents go so far away ? was it so very wrong in them to marry ? ”

“ No—not wrong at all. It is written : ‘ A man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife,’ ” was the baffling reply she got, and it silenced her. And not for that occasion only.

When Bessie retired into the octagon-parlour her grandfather stayed behind. He had been to see Mr John Short that day, and had heard that a new aspect had come over the electioneering sky. The Radicals had received an impetus from some quarter unknown, and were preparing to make such a hard fight for the representation of Normminster that the triumph of the Tory party was seriously

threatened. This news had vexed him, but it was not of that he meditated chiefly when he was left alone. It was of Bessie. He had founded certain pleasurable expectations upon her, and he felt that these expectations were losing their bloom. He could not fail to recollect her quietness of last night, when he noticed the languor of her eyes, the dejection of her mouth, and the effort it was to her to speak. The question concerning her parents had aroused the slumbering ache of old remembrance, and had stung him anew with a sense of her condemnation. A feeling akin to remorse visited him as he sat considering, and by degrees, realising, what he had done to her, and was doing ; but he had his motive, he had his object in it, and the motive had seemed to justify the means until he came to see her face to face. Contact with her warm, distinct humanity began immediately to work a change in his mind. Absent, he had decided that he could dispose of her as he would. Present, he

recognised that she would have a voice, and probably a casting voice, in the disposal of herself. He might sever her from her friends in the Forest, but he would not thereby attach her to friends and kinsfolk in the North. His last wanton act of selfish unkindness, in refusing to let her see her old home in passing, was evidently producing its effect in silent grieving, in resentment and revolt.

All his life long Mr Fairfax had coveted affection, and had missed the way to win it. No one had ever really loved him except his sister Dorothy—so he believed—and Elizabeth was so like Dorothy in the face, in her air, her voice, her gestures, that his heart went out to her with a yearning that was almost pain. But when he looked at her, she looked at him again like Dorothy alienated—like Dorothy grown strange. It was a very curious revival out of the far past. When he was a young man and Lady Latimer was a girl, there had been a prospect of a double marriage between their

families, but the day that destroyed one hope destroyed both, and Dorothy Fairfax died of that grief. Elizabeth, with her tear-worn eyes, was Dorothy's sad self to-night—only the eyes did not seek his friendly. They were gazing at pictures in the fire when he rejoined her, and though Bessie moved, and raised her head in courteous recognition of his coming, there was something of avoidance in her manner, as if she shrank from his inspection. Perhaps she did—she had no desire to parade her distresses or to reproach him with them. She meant to be good—only give her time. But she must have time.

There was a book of photographs on the table that Frederick Fairfax and his wife had collected during their wedding tour on the continent. It was during the early days of the art, and the pictures were as blurred and faded as their lives had since become. Bessie was turning them over with languid interest, when her grandfather perceiving how she was

employed, said he could show her some foreign views that would please her better than those dim photographs. He unlocked a drawer in the writing table and produced half-a-dozen little sketch-books—his own and his sister Dorothy's during their frequent travels together. It seemed that their practice had been to make an annual tour.

While Bessie examined the contents of the sketch-books, her grandfather stood behind her looking over her shoulder, and now and then saying a few words in explanation, though most of the scenes were named and dated. They were water-colour drawings—bits of landscape, picturesque buildings, grotesque and quaint figures, odd incidents of foreign life, all touched with tender humour, and evidently by a strong and skilful hand; and flowers, singly or in groups, full of a delicate fancy. In the last volume of the series there were no more flowers—the scenes were of snow-peaks and green hills, of won-

derful lake-water, and boats with awnings like the hood of a tilted cart ; and the sky was that of Italy.

"Oh, these are lovely—but why are there no more flowers ?" said Bessie thoughtlessly.

"Dorothy had given up going out then," said her grandfather in a low, strained voice.

Bessie caught her breath as she turned the next page, and came on a roughly washed-in mound of earth under an old wall where a white cross was set. A sudden mist clouded her sight, and then a tear fell on the paper.

"That is where she was buried—at Belagio, on Lake Como," said Mr Fairfax, and moved away.

Bessie continued to gaze at the closing page for several minutes without seeing it—then she turned back the leaves preceding, and read them again, as it were, in the sad light of the end. It was half a feint to hide or overcome her emotion ; for her imagination had figured to her that last mournful journey.

Her grandfather saw how she was affected—saw the trembling of her hand as she paused upon the sketches, and the furtive winking away of her tears. Dear Bessie! smiles and tears were so easy to her yet. If she had dared to yield to a natural impulse, she would have shut the melancholy record, and have run to comfort him; would have clasped her hands round his arm, and laid her cheek against his shoulder, and have said: “Oh, poor grandpapa!” with most genuine pity and sympathy. But he stood upon the hearth with his back to the fire, erect, stiff as a ramrod, with gloom in his eyes and lips compressed; and anything in the way of a caress would probably have amazed more than it would have flattered him. Bessie, therefore, refrained herself, and for ever so long there was silence in the room, except for the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece, and the occasional dropping of the ashes from the bars. At last, she left looking at the sketches

and mechanically reverted to the photographs, upon which Mr Fairfax came out of his reverie and spoke again. She was weary, but the evening was now almost over.

"I do not like those sun-pictures. They are not permanent, and a water-colour drawing is more pleasing to begin with. You can draw a little, Elizabeth ? Have you any sketches about Caen or Bayeux ? "

Bessie modestly said that she had, and went to bring them—school-girl fashion she wished to exhibit her work, and to hear that the money spent on her neglected education had not been all spent in vain. Her grandfather was graciously inclined to commend her productions. He told her that she had a nice touch, and that it was quite worth her while to cultivate her talent. "It will add a great interest to your travels—when you have the chance of travelling," he said ; "for, like life itself, travelling has many blank spaces that

a taste for sketching agreeably fills up.—Ten o'clock already? Yes—good night."

The following morning Mr Fairfax and Bessie walked to church together. Along the road everybody acknowledged the Squire with bow or curtsey, and the little children stood respectfully at gaze as he passed. He returned the civility of all by lifting a forefinger to his hat though he spoke to none, and Bessie was led to understand that he had the confidence of his people, and that he probably deserved it. For a sign that there was no bitterness in her own feelings, each token of regard was noted by her with satisfaction.

At the Lodge Colonel and Mrs Stokes joined them, and Mrs Stokes' bright eyes frankly appreciated the elegant simplicity of Bessie's attire, her chip bonnet and daisies, her dress of French spun silk, white and violet

striped, and perfectly fitting Paris gloves. She nodded meaningly to Bessie, and Bessie smiled back her full comprehension that the survey was satisfactory and pleasing.

Some old customs still prevailed at Kirkham. The humble congregation was settled in church before the Squire entered his red-curtained pew, and sat quiet after sermon until the Squire went out. Bessie's thoughts roved often during the service. Mr Forbes read apace, and the clerk sang out the responses like an echo with no time to lose. There had been a death in the village during the past week, and the event was now commemorated by a dirge in which the children's shrill treble was supported by the majority of the congregation. The sermon also took up the moral of life and death. It was short and pithy ; perhaps it was familiar, and none the less useful for that. Mr Forbes was not concerned to lead his people into new ways ; he believed the old were better. Work and pray, fear

God and keep His commandments, love your neighbour, and meddle not with those who are given to change—these were his cardinal points, from which he brought to bear on their consciences much powerful doctrine and purifying precept. He was a man of high courage and robust faith who practised what he preached, and bore that cheerful countenance which is a sign of a heart in prosperity.

After service Colonel and Mrs Stokes walked home with Mr Fairfax and Bessie, lunched at Abbotsmead, and lounged about the garden afterwards. This was an institution—Sunday is long in country-houses, and good neighbours help one another to get rid of it. The Stokes' boys came in the afternoon, to Bessie's great joy—they made a noisy play-ground of the garden, and behaved just like Jack and Tom and Willy Carnegie, kicking up their heels, and laughing at nothing.

“There are no more gooseberries!” cried their mother, catching the younger of the two,

a bluff copy of herself, and offering him to Bessie to kiss. Bessie kissed him heartily. "You are fond of children, I can see," said her new friend.

"I like a houseful! Oh, when have I had a nice kiss at a boy's hard round cheeks? Not for years! years! I had five little brothers and two sisters at home."

Mrs Stokes regarded Bessie with a touched surprise, but she asked no questions; she knew her story in a general inaccurate way. The boy gazed in her face with a pretty lovingness, rubbed his nose suddenly against hers, wrestled himself out of her embrace, and ran away. "When you feel as if you wanted a good kiss, come to my house," said his mother, her blue eyes shining tenderly. "It must be dreadful to miss little children when you have lived with them. I could not bear it! Abbotsmead always looks to me like a great dull splendid prison."

"My grandfather makes it as pleasant to

me as he can—I don't repine," said Bessie quickly. "He has given me a beautiful little filly to ride, but she is not quite trained yet ; and I shall beg him to let me have a companionable dog—I love a dog."

The church-bells began to ring for afternoon service. Mrs Stokes shook her head at Bessie's query—nobody ever went, she said, but servants and poor people. Evening service there was none, and Mr Forbes dined with the Squire—that also was an institution. The gentlemen talked of parochial matters, and Bessie, wisely inferring that they could talk more freely in her absence, left them to themselves, and retreated to her private parlour, to read a little, and dream a great deal of her friends in the Forest.

At dusk there was a loud jangling indoors and out, and Mrs Betts summoned her young lady downstairs. She met her grandfather and Mr Forbes issuing from the dining-room, and they passed together into the hall, where

the servants of the house stood on parade to receive their pastor and master. They were assembled for prayers. Once a week, after supper, this compliment was paid to the Almighty—a remnant of ancient custom which the Squire refused to alter or amend. When Bessie had assisted at this ceremony she had gone through the whole duty of the day, and her reflection on her experience since she came to Abbotsmead was that life as a pageant must be dull—duller than life as a toil.

## CHAPTER V.

### A DISCOVERY.

WHILE Bessie Fairfax was pronouncing the web of her fortunes dull, Fate was spinning some mingled threads to throw into the pattern, and give it intricacy and liveliness. The next day Mrs Stokes chaperoned her to Normminster in quest of that blue bonnet. Mrs Betts went also, and had a world of shopping to help in on behalf of her young mistress. They drove from the station first to the chief tailor's in High Street, the ladies' habit maker, then to the fashionable hosier, the fashionable haberdasher. By three o'clock Bessie felt herself flagging. What did she want with so many fine clothes ? she inquired of Mrs Stokes with an air of appeal. She was learning that

to get up only one character in life as a pageant involves weariness, labour, pains, and money.

" You are going to stay at Brentwood," rejoined her chaperone conclusively.

" And is it so dull at Brentwood that dressing is a resource ? " Bessie demurred.

" Wait and see. You will have pleasant occupation enough, I should think ! Most girls would call this an immense treat. But if you are really tired we will go to Miss Jocund now. Mrs Betts can choose ribbons and gloves."

Miss Jocund was a large-featured woman of a grave and wise countenance. She read the newspaper in intervals of business, and was reading it now with her glasses on. Lowering the paper she recognised a favourite customer in Mrs Stokes, and laid the news by, but with reluctance. Duty forbade, however, that this lady should be remitted to an assistant.

" I am sorry to disturb you, Miss Jocund,

but it is important—it is about a bonnet," cried Mrs Stokes gaily. "I have brought you Miss Fairfax of Abbotsmead. I am sure you will make her something quite lovely."

Miss Jocund took off her glasses, and gave Bessie a deliberate, discerning look-over. "Very happy, ma'am, indeed. Blue, of course?" she said. Bessie acquiesced. "Any taste, any style?" the milliner further queried.

"Yes. Give me always simplicity, and no imitations," was the unhesitating, concise reply.

"Miss Fairfax and I understand one another. Anything more to day, ladies?" Bessie and Mrs Stokes considered for a moment, and then said they would not detain Miss Jocund any longer from her newspaper. "Ah! ladies, who can exist altogether on *chiffons?*" rejoined the milliner half apologetically. "I do love my *Times*—I call it my 'gentleman.' I cannot live without my gentleman. Yes, ladies, he does smell of tobacco. That is because he

spends a day and night in the bar-parlour of the Shakespeare Tavern before he visits me. So do evil communications corrupt good manners. The door, Miss Lawson—Good afternoon, ladies."

" You must not judge of Miss Jocund as a milliner, and nothing more," her chaperone instructed Bessie when they had left the shop. " She is a lady herself. Her father was Dr Jocund—the best physician in Normminster when you could find him sober. He died, and left his daughter with only debts for a fortune; she turned milliner, and has paid every sixpence of them."

Where were they to go next? Bessie recollect ed that her Uncle Laurence lived in the vicinity of the Minster, and that she had an errand to him from her grandfather. She had undertaken it cheerfully, feeling that it would be a pleasure to see her kind Uncle Laurence again. There was a warmth of

geniality about him that was absent from her Uncle Frederick and her grandfather; and she had decided that if she was to have any friend amongst her kinsfolk her Uncle Laurence would be that friend. She was sure that her father, whom she barely knew, had been most like him.

It was not far to Minster Court, and they directed their steps that way. The streets of Normminster still preserve much of their picturesque antiquity, but they are dull, undeniably dull, except on the occasion of assizes, races, fairs, and the annual assembling of the yeomanry and militia. Elections are no more the saturnalia they used to be in the good old times. Bessie was reminded of Bayeux and its sultry drowsiness, as they passed into the green purlieus of the Minster, and under a low-browed archway into a spacious paved court, where the sun slept on the red brick backs of the old houses. Mr Laurence Fairfax's door

was in the most remote corner, up a semi-circular flight of steps, guarded on either side by an iron railing.

As the two ladies approached the steps a young countrywoman came down them, saying in a mingled strain of persuasion and threat: "Come, Master Justus! if you don't come along this minute, I'll tell your gran-ma!" And a naughty invisible voice made an answer with lisping defiance: "Well, go, Sally, go! be quick! go before your shoes wear out."

Mrs Stokes rounding her pretty eyes and pretty mouth, cried softly: "Oh, what a very rude little boy!" And the very rude little boy appeared in sight, hustled coaxingly behind by the stout respectable housekeeper of Mr Laurence Fairfax. When he saw the strange ladies he stood stock-still, and gazed at them as bold as Hector; and they gazed at him again in mute amazement,—a cherub of four years old or thereabouts, with big blue eyes and yellow

curls. When he had satisfied himself with gazing, he descended the steps, and set off suddenly at a run for the archway. The housekeeper had a flushed, uneasy smile on her face as she recognised Mrs Stokes—a smile of amused consternation, which the little lady's shocked grimace provoked. Bessie herself laughed in looking at her again, and the housekeeper rallied her composure enough to say : “ Oh, the self-will and naughtiness there is in boys, ma'am ! but you know it, having boys of your own ? ”

“ Too well, Mrs Burrage, too well ! Is Mr Laurence Fairfax at home ? ”

“ I am sorry to say that he is not ; ma'am. May I make bold to ask if the young lady is Miss Fairfax from Abbotsmead, that was expected ? ”

Bessie confessed to her identity, and while Mrs Stokes wrote the name of Miss Fairfax on one of her own visiting cards (for Bessie was still unprovided), Burrage begged, as an

old servant of the house, to offer her best wishes, and to inquire after the health of the Squire. They were interrupted by that little rude boy who came running back into the court, with Sally in pursuit. He was shouting too at the top of his voice, and making its solemn echoes ring again. Burrage with sudden gravity watched what would ensue. Capture ensued, and a second evasion into the street. Burrage shook her head, as who would say that Sally's riotous charge was far beyond her control,—which indubitably he was,—and Bessie forgot her errand entirely. Whose was that little boy, the picture of herself ? Mrs Stokes recovered her countenance. They turned to go, and were half way across the court when the housekeeper called after them in haste : “ Ladies, ladies, my master has come in by the garden way, if you will be pleased to return ? ” and they returned; neither of them by word or look affording to the other any intimation of her profound reflections.

Mr Laurence Fairfax received his visitors with a frank welcome, and bade Burrage bring them a cup of tea. Mrs Stokes soon engaged him in easy chat, but Bessie sat by in perplexed rumination, trying to reconcile the existence of that little flaxen-haired boy with her pre-conceived notions of her bachelor uncle. The view of him had let in a light upon her future, that pleased while it confused her. The reason it pleased her, she would discern as her thoughts cleared. At this moment she was dazzled by a series of surprises. First by the sight of that cherub, and then by the order that reigned through this quaint and narrow house where her learned kinsman lived. They had come up a winding stair into a large, light hall, lined with books, and peopled by marble sages on pedestals, from which opened two doors—the one into a small red parlour where the philosopher ate, the other into a long room looking to the garden and the Minster, furnished with the choicest collections of his

travelled youth. The “omnibus” of Canon Fournier used to be all dusty disorder. Bessie’s silence and her vagrant eyes misled her uncle into the supposition that his old stones, old canvases, and ponderous quartos interested her curiosity, and noticing that they settled, at length, with an intelligent scrutiny on some object beyond him, he asked what it was, and moved to see.

Nothing rich, nothing rare or ancient—only the tail and woolly hind-quarters of a toy lamb, extruded from the imperfectly closed door of a cupboard below a book-case! Instantly he jumped up, and went to shut the cupboard—but first he must open it to thrust in the lamb, and out it tumbled bodily, and after it a waggon with red wheels and black spotted horses harnessed thereto. As he awkwardly restored them, Mrs Stokes never moved a muscle; but Bessie smiled irrepressibly, and in her uncle’s face, as he returned to his seat with a fine confusion blushing thereon. At that moment

Burrage came in with the tea. No doubt Mrs Stokes was equally astonished to see a nursery-cupboard in a philosopher's study, but she could turn her discourse to circumstances with more skill than her unworldly companion, and she resumed the thread of their interrupted chat with perfect composure. Mr Laurence Fairfax could not, however, take her cue, and he rose with readiness at the first movement of the ladies to go. He began to say to Bessie that she must make his house her home when she wanted to come to Norminster, and that he should always be glad of her company. Bessie thanked him, and as she looked up in his benevolent face, there was a pure friendliness in her eyes that he responded to by a warm pressure of her hand. And as he closed the door upon them, he dismissed his sympathetic niece with a most kind and kinsman-like nod.

Mrs Stokes began to laugh when they were clear of the house. "A pretty discovery! Mr Laurence Fairfax has a little play-fellow—sup-

pose he should turn out to be a married man ! ” cried she under her breath. “ So that is the depth of his philosophy ! My Arthur will be mightily amused ! ”

“ What a darling little naughty boy that was,” whispered Bessie also laughing. “ How I should like to have him at Abbotsmead ! What fun it would be ! ”

“ Mind, you don’t mention him at Abbotsmead ! Mr Fairfax will be the last to hear of him—the mother must be some unpresentable person. If Mr Laurence Fairfax is married, it will be so much the worse for you ! ”

“ Nothing in the way of little Fairfax boys can be the worse for me ! ” was Bessie’s airy, pleasant rejoinder. And she felt exhilarated as by a sudden, sunshiny break in the cloudy monotony of her horizon.

Mr Laurence Fairfax returned to his study when he had parted with his visitors, and there he found Burrage awaiting him. “ Sir,”

she said with a gravity befitting the occasion,  
“ I must tell you that Master Justus has been  
seen by those two ladies.”

“ And Master Justus’s pet lamb and cart-and-horses,” quoth her master as seriously.  
“ You had thrown the toys into the cupboard too hastily, or you had not fastened the door, and the lamb’s legs stuck out. Miss Fairfax made a note of them.”

“ Ah ! sir, if you would but let Mr John Short speak before the story gets round to your respected father the wrong way,” pleaded Burrage. Mr Laurence Fairfax did not answer her. She said no more, but shook her head and went away, leaving him to his reflections —which were more mischievous than the reflections of philosophers are commonly supposed to be.

Bessie returned to Kirkham a changed creature. Her hopefulness had rallied to the front. Her mind was filled with blithe anticipations

founded on that dear little naughty boy, and his incongruous cupboard of playthings in her uncle's study.

If there was a boy for heir to Abbotsmead, nobody would want her—she might go back to the Forest. Secrets and mysteries always come out in the end! She had sagacity enough to know that she must not speak of what she had seen,—if the little boy was openly to be spoken of he would have been named to her. But she might speculate about him as much as she pleased in the recesses of her fancy. And, oh, what a comfort was that!

Mr Fairfax at dinner observed her revived animation, and asked for an account of her doings in Normminster. Then, and not till then, did Bessie recollect his message to her Uncle Laurence, and penitently confessed her forgetfulness—unable to confess the occasion of it. “It is of no importance—I took the precaution of writing to him this afternoon,”

said her grandfather dryly, and Bessie's confusion was doubled. She thought he would never have any confidence in her again. Presently he said : "This is the last evening we shall be alone for some time, Elizabeth. Mr Cecil Burleigh and his sister Mary, whom you have seen, will arrive to-morrow, and on Thursday you will go with me to Lady Angleby's for a few nights. I trust you will be able to make a friend of Miss Burleigh."

To this long speech Bessie gave her attention and a submissive assent, followed by a rather silly wish. "I wish it was to Lady Latimer's we were going instead of to Lady Angleby's—I don't like Lady Angleby!"

"That does not much matter, if you preserve the same measure of courtesy towards her as if you did," rejoined her grandfather. "It is unnecessary to announce your preferences and prejudices by word of mouth, and it would be unpardonable to obtrude them by your behaviour. It is not of obligation that

because she is a grand lady you should esteem her, but it is of obligation that you should curtsey to her—you understand me? Do not let your ironical humour mislead you into forgetting the first principle of good manners—to render to all their due." Mr Fairfax also had read Pascal.

Bessie's cheeks burned under this severe admonition, but she did not attempt to extenuate her fault, and after a brief silence her grandfather said to make peace: "It is not impossible that your longing to see Lady Latimer may be gratified. She still comes into Woldshire at intervals, and she will take an interest in Mr Cecil Burleigh's election." But Bessie felt too much put down to trust herself to speak again, and the rest of the meal passed in a constrained quiet.

This was not the way towards a friendly and affectionate understanding. Nevertheless Bessie was not so crushed as she would have been, but for the vision of that unexplained

cherub who had usurped the regions of her imagination. If the time present wearied her, she had gained a wide out-look to a *beyond* that was bright enough to dream of, to inspire her with hope, and sustain her against oppression. Mr Fairfax discerned that she felt her bonds more easy—perhaps expecting the time when they would be loosed. His conjectures for a reason why were grounded on the confidential propensities of women, and the probability that Mrs Stokes, during their long *tête-à-tête* that day, had divulged the plots for her wooing and wedding. How far wide of the mark these conjectures were, he would learn by and by. Meanwhile, as the effect of the unknown magic was to make her gayer, more confident, and more interested in passing events, he was well pleased. His preference was for sweet acquiescence in women, but, for an exception, he liked his granddaughter best when she was least afraid of him.

## CHAPTER VI.

### PRELIMINARIES.

MR CECIL BURLEIGH met Bessie Fairfax again with a courteous vivacity, and an air of intimate acquaintance. If he was not very glad to see her, he affected gladness well, and Bessie's vivid blushes were all the welcome that was necessary to delude the witnesses into a belief that they already understood one another. He was perfectly satisfied himself, and his sister Mary, who worshipped him, thought Bessie sweetly modest and pretty. And her mind was at peace for the results.

There was a dinner-party at Abbotsmead that evening. Colonel and Mrs Stokes came, and Mr Forbes and his mother who lived with him (for he was unmarried), a most agreeable old lady. It was much like other dinner-parties

in the country. The guests were all of one mind on politics and the paramount importance of the landed interest, which gave a delightful unanimity to the conversation. The table was round, so that Miss Fairfax did not appear conspicuous as the lady of the house, but she was not for that the less critically observed. Happily she was unconscious of the ordeal she underwent. She looked lovely in the face, but her dress was not the elaborate dress of the other ladies ; it was still her prize-day white muslin, high to the throat and long to the wrists, with a red rose in her belt, and an antique Normandy gold cross for her sole ornament. The cross was a gift from Madame Fournier. Mr Cecil Burleigh, being seated next to her, was most condescending in his efforts to be entertaining, and Bessie was not quite so uneasy under his affability as she had been on board the yacht. Mrs Stokes, who had heard much of the Tory candidate, but now met him for the first time,

regarded him with awe, impressed by his distinguished air and fine manners. But Bessie was more diffident than impressed. She did not talk much—everybody else was so willing to talk that it was enough for her to look charming. Once or twice her grandfather glanced towards her, wishing to hear her voice—which was a most tunable voice—in reply to her magnificent neighbour, but Bessie sat in beaming, beautiful silence, lending him her ears, and at intervals giving him a monosyllabic reply. She might certainly have done worse. She might have spoken foolishly—or she might have said what she occasionally thought, in contradiction of his solemn opinions. And surely this would have been unwise? Her silence was pleasing, and he wished for nothing in her different from what she seemed. He liked her youthfulness, and approved her simplicity as an eminently teachable characteristic, and if she was not able greatly to interest or amuse him, perhaps

that was not from any fault or deficiency in herself, but from circumstances over which she had no control. An old love, a true love, unwillingly relinquished, is a powerful rival.

The whole of the following day was at his service to walk and talk with Bessie if he and she pleased ; but Bessie invited Miss Burleigh into her private parlour, and went into seclusion. That was after breakfast, and Mr Cecil made a tour of the stables with the Squire, and saw Janey take her morning gallop. Then he spoke in praise of Janey's mistress while on board the *Foam*, and with all the enthusiasm at his command of his own hopes. They had not become expectations yet.

"It is uphill work with Elizabeth," said her grandfather. "She cares for none of us here."

"The harder to win the more constant to keep," replied the aspirant suitor cheerfully.

"I shall put no pressure on her. Here is your opportunity, and you must rely on yourself. She has a heart, for those who can reach

it, but my efforts have fallen short thus far." This was not what the Squire had once thought to say.

Mr Cecil Burleigh did not admire gushing, demonstrative women, and a gushing wife would have wearied him inexpressibly. He felt an attraction in Bessie's aloofness, and said again : " She is worth the pains she will cost to win—a few years will mature her fine intelligence, and make of her a perfect companion. I admire her courageous simplicity—there is a great deal in her character to work upon."

" She is no cipher, certainly ; if you are satisfied I am," said Mr Fairfax resignedly. " Yet it is not flattering to think that she would toss up her cap to go back to the Forest to-morrow."

" Then she is loyal in affection to very worthy people. I have heard of her Forest friends from Lady Latimer."

" Lady Latimer has a great hold on

Elizabeth's imagination. It would be a good thing if she were to pay a visit to Hartwell—she might give her young devotee some valuable instructions. Elizabeth is prejudiced against me, and does not fall into her new condition so happily as I was led to anticipate that she might."

"She will wear to it. My sister Mary has an art of taming, and will help her. I prefer her indifference to an undue elation—that would argue a commonness of mind from which I imagine her to be quite free."

"She has her own way of estimating us, and treats the state and luxury of Abbotsmead as quite external to her. In her private thoughts, I fear, she treats them as cumbrous lendings that she will throw off after a season, and be gladly quit of their burden."

"Better so than in the other extreme. A girl of heart and mind cannot be expected to identify herself suddenly with the customs of a strange rank. She was early trained in the

habits of a simple household, but from what I see there can have been nothing wanting of essential refinement in Mrs Carnegie. There is a crudeness in Miss Fairfax yet—she is very young — but she will ripen sound and sweet to the core, or I am much mistaken in the quality of the green fruit."

The Squire replied that he had no reason to believe his granddaughter was otherwise than a good girl. And with that they left discussing her, and fell upon the election. Mr Cecil Burleigh had a good courage for the encounter, but he also had received intimations not to make too sure of his success. The Fairfax influence had been so long in abeyance, so long only a name in Norminster, that Mr John Short began to quake the moment he began to test it. Once upon a time Norminster had returned a Fairfax as a matter of course, but for a generation its tendencies had been more and more towards Liberalism, and at the last election it had returned its old Whig member

at the head of the poll, and in lieu of its old Tory member, a native lawyer, one Bradley, who professed Radicalism on the hustings, but pruned his opinions in the House to the useful working pattern of a supporter of the ministry. This prudent gentleman was considered by the majority of his constituents not to have played fair, and it was as against him, traitor and turn-coat, that the old Tories and moderate Conservatives were going to try to bring in Mr Cecil Burleigh. Both sides were prepared to spend money, and Normminster was enjoying lively anticipations of a good time coming.

While the gentlemen were thus discoursing to and fro the terrace under the library windows, Miss Burleigh, in Bessie's parlour, was instructing her of her brother's political views. It is to be feared that Bessie was less interested than the subject deserved, and also less interested in the proprietor of the said views than his sister supposed her to be. She lis-

tened respectfully, however, and did not answer very much at random, considering that she was totally ignorant beforehand of all that was being explained to her. At length she said : “I must begin to read the newspapers. I know much better what happened in the days of Queen Elizabeth than what has happened in my own lifetime ;” and then Miss Burleigh left politics, and began to speak of her brother’s personal ambition and personal qualities ; to relate anecdotes of his signal success at Eton and at Oxford ; to expatiate on her own devotion to him, and the great expectations founded by all his family upon his high character and splendid abilities. She added that he had the finest temper in the world, and that he was ardently affectionate.

Bessie smiled at this. She believed that she knew where his ardent affections were centred ; and then she blushed at the tormenting recollection of how she had interpreted his assiduities to herself before making that

discovery. Miss Burleigh saw the blush, seeming to see nothing, and said softly : "I envy the woman who has to pass her life with Cecil. I can imagine nothing more contenting than his society to one he loves."

Bessie's blush was perpetuated. She would have liked to mention Miss Julia Gardiner, but she felt a restraining delicacy in speaking of what had come to her knowledge in such a casual way, and more than ever ashamed of her own ridiculous mistake. Suddenly she broke out with an odd query, at the same moment clapping her hands to her traitorous cheeks. "Do you ever blush at your own foolish fancies ? Oh, how tiresome it is to have a trick of blushing. I wish I could get over it !"

"It is a trick we get over quite early enough. The fancies girls blush at are so innocent ! I have had none of that pretty sort for a long while."

Miss Burleigh looked sympathetic and

amused. Bessie was silent for a few minutes, and full of thought. Presently, in a musing meditative voice, she said : “ Ambition—I suppose all men who have force enough to do great things long for opportunity to do them—and that we call ambition. Harry Musgrave is ambitious. He is going to be a lawyer. What can a famous lawyer become ? ”

“ Lord Chancellor—the highest civil dignity under the crown.”

“ Then I shall set my mind on seeing Harry Lord Chancellor ! ” cried Bessie with bold conclusion.

“ And when he retires from office, though he may have held it for ever so short a time, he will have a pension of five thousand a year.”

“ How pleasant ! What a grateful country ! Then he will be able to buy Brook, and spend his holidays there. Dear old Harry ! we were like brother and sister once, and I feel as if I had a right to be proud of him as you are of your brother Cecil. Women have no chance

of being ambitious on their own account, have they ? ”

“ Oh yes. Women are as ambitious of rank, riches, and power as men are ; and some are ambitious of doing what they imagine to be great deeds. You will probably meet one at Brentwood, a most beautiful lady, she is—a Mrs Chiverton.”

Bessie’s countenance flashed. “ She was a Miss Hiloe, was she not—Ada Hiloe ? I knew her. She was at Madame Fournier’s—she and a younger sister, during my first year there.”

“ Then you will be glad to meet again. She was married in Paris only the other day, and has come into Woldshire a bride. They say she is showing herself a prodigy of benevolence round her husband’s magnificent seat already —she married him that she might have the power to do good with his immense wealth. There must always be some self-sacrifice in a lofty ambition, but hers is a sacrifice that few women could endure to pay.”

Bessie held her peace. She had been instructed how all but impossible it is to live in the world, and be absolutely truthful, and what perplexed her in this new character of her old school-fellow she therefore supposed to be the veil of glamour which the world requires to have thrown over an ugly, naked truth.

About eleven o'clock the two young ladies walked out across the park towards the Lodge, to pay a visit to Mrs Stokes. Then they walked on to the village, and home again by the mill. The morning seemed long drawn out. Then followed luncheon, and after it Mr Cecil Burleigh drove in an open carriage with Bessie and his sister to Hartwell. The afternoon was very clear and pleasant, and the scenery sufficiently varied. On the road Bessie learnt that Hartwell was the early home of Lady Latimer, and still the residence of her bachelor brother and two maiden sisters.

The very name of Lady Latimer acted like a spell on Bessie. She had been rather silent

and reserved until she heard it, and then, all at once, she roused up into vivid interest. Mr Cecil Burleigh studied her more attentively than he had done hitherto. Miss Burleigh said : “Lady Latimer is another of our ambitious women. Miss Fairfax fancies women can have no ambition on their own account, Cecil. I have been telling her of Mrs Chiverton.”

“And what does Miss Fairfax say of Mrs Chiverton’s ambition ?” asked Mr Cecil Burleigh.

“Nothing,” rejoined Bessie. But her delicate lip and nostril expressed a great deal.

The man of the world preferred her reticence to the wisest speech. He mused for several minutes before he spoke again himself. Then he gave air to some of his reflections. “Lady Latimer has great qualities. Her marriage was the blunder of her youth. Her girlish imagination was dazzled by the name of a lord and the splendour of Umpleby. It remains to

be considered that she was not one of the melting sort, and that she made her life noble."

Here Miss Burleigh took up the story.  
"That is true. But she would have made it more noble if she had been faithful to her first love—to your grandfather, Miss Fairfax."

Bessie coloured. "Oh, were they fond of each other when they were young?" she asked wondering.

"Your grandfather was devoted to her. He had just succeeded to Abbotsmead. All the world thought it would be a match, and great promotion for her too, when she met Lord Latimer. He was sixty and she was nineteen, and they lived together thirty-seven years; for he survived into quite extreme old age."

"And she had no children, and my grandfather married somebody else?" said Bessie with a plaintive fall in her voice.

"She had no children, and your grand-

father married somebody else. Lady Latimer was a most excellent wife to her old tyrant."

Bessie looked sorrowful. "Was he a tyrant? I wonder whether she ever pities herself for the love she threw away. She is quite alone—she would give anything that people should love her now, I have heard them say in the Forest."

"That is the revenge that slighted love so often takes. But she must have satisfaction in her life too. She was always more proud than tender, except, perhaps, to her friend, Dorothy Fairfax. You have heard of your great-aunt Dorothy?"

"Yes. I have succeeded to her rooms, to her books. My grandfather says I remind him of her."

"Dorothy Fairfax never forgave Lady Latimer. They had been familiar friends, and there was a double separation. Oh, it is quite a romance! My aunt, Lady Angleby, could

tell you all about it; for she was quite one with them at Abbotsmead and Hartwell in those days—indeed the intimacy has never been interrupted. And you know Lady Latimer—you admire her?"

"I used to admire her enthusiastically—I should like to see her again."

After this there was silence until the drive ended at Hartwell. Bessie was meditating on the glimpse she had got into the pathetic past of her grandfather's life; and Mr. Cecil Burleigh and his sister were meditating upon her.

Hartwell was a modest brick house within a garden skirting the road. It had a retired air, as of a poor gentleman's house whose slender fortunes limit his tastes—Mr Oliver Smith's fortunes were very slender, and he shared them with two maiden sisters. The shrubs were well grown and the grass was well kept, but there was no show of the gorgeous scentless flowers which make the gardens of the

wealthy so gay and splendid in summer. Ivy clothed the walls, and old-fashioned flowers bloomed all the year round in the borders, but it was not a very cheerful garden in the afternoon.

Two elderly ladies were pacing the lawn arm-in-arm, with straw hats tilted over their noses, when the Abbotsmead carriage stopped at the gate. They stood an instant to see whose it was, and then hurried forward to welcome their visitors.

"This is very kind, Mr Cecil, very kind, Miss Mary—but you always are kind in remembering old friends," said the elder, Miss Juliana, and then was silent, gazing at Bessie.

"This is Miss Fairfax," said Mr Cecil Burleigh. "Lady Latimer has, no doubt, named her in her letters."

"Ah! yes, yes—what am I dreaming about? Charlotte," turning to her sister, "who is she like?"

"She is like poor Dorothy," was the answer in a tremulous, solemn voice. "What will Oliver say?"

"How long is it since Lady Latimer saw you, my dear?" asked Miss Juliana.

"Three years. I have not been home to the Forest since I left it to go to school in France."

"Ah! then that accounts for our sister not having mentioned to us your wonderful resemblance to your great-aunt, Dorothy Fairfax. Three years alter and refine a child's chubby face into a young woman's face."

Miss Juliana seemed to be thrown into irretrievable confusion by Bessie's apparition and her own memory. She was quite silent as she led the way to the house, walking between Mr Cecil Burleigh and his sister. Miss Charlotte walked behind with Bessie, and remarked that she was pleased to have a link of acquaintance with her already by means of Lady Latimer. Bessie asked whether Lady

Latimer was likely soon to come into Woldshire.

"We have not heard that she has any present intention of visiting us. Her visits are few and far between," was the formal reply.

"I wish she would. When I was a little girl she was my ideal of all that is grand, gracious, and lovely," said Bessie.

Bessie's little out-break had done her good, had set her tongue at liberty. Her self-consciousness was growing less obtrusive. Mr Cecil Burleigh explained to her the legal process of an election for a member of parliament, and Miss Burleigh sat by in satisfied silence, observing the quick intelligence of her face, and the flattered interest in her brother's. At the park gates Mr Fairfax, returning from a visit to one of his farmsteads where building was in progress, met the carriage, and got in. His first question was what Mr Oliver Smith had said about the coming election, and whether he would be in Normminster the following day.

The news about Buller troubled him no little, to judge by his countenance, but he did not say much beyond an exclamation, that they would carry the contest through, let it cost what it might. "We have been looking forward to this contest ever since Bradley was returned five years ago—we will not be so faint-hearted as to yield without a battle. If we are defeated again we may count Norminster lost to the Conservative interest."

"Oh, don't talk of defeat! we shall be far more likely to win if we refuse to contemplate the possibility of defeat!" cried Bessie with girlish vivacity.

Mr Cecil Burleigh laughed and said: "Miss Fairfax is right. She will wear my colours, and I will adopt her logic, and ostrich-like, refuse to see the perils that threaten me."

"No, no!" remonstrated Bessie casting off her shy reserve under encouragement. "So far from hiding your face you must make it

familiar in every street in Normminster. You must seek if you would find, and ask if you would have. I would ! I should hate to be beaten by my own neglect worse than by my rival ! ”

Mr Fairfax was electrified at this brusque assertion of her sentiments by his granddaughter. Her audacity seemed, at least, equal to her shyness. “ Very good advice, Elizabeth ; make him follow it,” said he dryly.

“ We will give him no rest when we have him at Brentwood,” added Miss Burleigh. “ But though he is so cool about it, I believe he is dreadfully in earnest. Are you not, Cecil ? ”

“ I will not be beaten by my own neglect,” was his rejoinder, with a glance at Bessie, blushing beautifully.

They did not relapse into constraint any more that day. There was no addition to the company at dinner, and the evening being genially warm, they enjoyed it in the garden.

Mr Cecil Burleigh and Miss Fairfax even strolled as far as the ruins in the park, and on the way he enlightened her respecting some of his opinions, tastes, and prejudices. She heard him attentively, and found him very instructive. His clever conversation was a compliment to which, as a bright girl, she was not insensible. His sister had detailed to him her behaviour on her introduction to Lady Angleby, and had deplored her lively sense of the ridiculous. Miss Burleigh had the art of taming that her brother credited her with, and Elizabeth was already at ease and happy with her—free to be herself, as she felt, and not always on guard, and measuring her words; and the more of her character that she revealed, the better Miss Burleigh liked her. Her gaiety of temper was very attractive when it was kept within due bounds, and she had a most sweet docility of tractableness when approached with caution. At the close of the evening she retired to her white parlour with

a rather exalted feeling of responsibility, having promised, at Mr Cecil Burleigh's instigation, to study certain essays of Lord Bacon on government and seditions in states for the informing of her mind. She took the volume down from Dorothy Fairfax's bookshelf, and laid it on her table for a reminder. Miss Burleigh saw it there in the morning.

"Ah! dear Cecil, he will try to make you very wise and learned," said she, nodding her head and smiling significantly. "But never mind! he waltzes to perfection, and delights in a ball, no man more!"

"Does he!" cried Bessie amused and laughing. "That potent, grave, and reverend signor can condescend, then, to frivolities! Oh, when shall we have a ball that I may waltz with him!"

"Soon—if all go successfully at the election. Lady Angleby will give a ball if Cecil win, and you ask her."

"*I* ask her! But I should never dare!"

"She will be only too glad of the opportunity—and you may dare anything with her when she is pleased. She has always been dear Cecil's fast friend, and his triumph will be her's. She will want to celebrate it joyously, and nothing is really so joyous as a good dance. We will have a good dance."

## CHAPTER VII.

### BESSIE SHOWS CHARACTER.

AT breakfast Mr Fairfax handed a letter to Bessie. "From home, from my mother," said she in a glad undertone, and instantly, without apology, opened and read it. Mr Cecil Burleigh took a furtive observation of her while she was thus occupied. What a good countenance she had, how the slight emotion of her lips and the lustrous shining under her dark eyelashes enhanced her beauty! It was a letter to make her happy, to give her a light heart to go to Brentwood with. Mrs Carnegie was always sympathetic, cheerful, and loving in her letters. She encouraged her dear Bessie to reconcile herself to absence, and attach herself to her new home by cultivating all its sources of interest, and especially

the affection of her grandfather. She gave her much tender, reasonable advice for her guidance, and she gave her good news : they were all well at home and at Brook, and Harry Musgrave had come out in honours at Oxford. The sunshine of pure content irradiated Bessie's face. She looked up. She wanted to communicate her joy. Her grandfather looked up at the same moment, and their eyes met.

"Would you like to read it ? It is from my mother," she said, holding out the letter with an impulse to be good to him.

"I can trust you with your correspondence, Elizabeth," was his reply.

She drew back her hand quickly, and laid down the letter by her plate. She sipped her tea, her throat aching, her eyes swimming. The Squire began to talk rather fast and loud, and in a few minutes, the meal being over, he pushed away his chair, and left the room.

"The train we go into Normminster by reaches

Mitford Junction at ten thirty-five," observed Mr Cecil Burleigh.

Bessie rose and vanished with a mutinous air, which made him laugh and whisper to his sister, as she disappeared, that the young lady had a rare spirit. Mr Fairfax was in the hall. She went swiftly up to him, and laying a hand on his arm, said in a quivering, resolute voice : "Read my letter, grandpapa ! If you will not recognise those I have the best right to love, we shall be strangers always, you and I."

"Come upstairs. I will read your letter," said the old man shortly, and he mounted to her parlour, she still keeping her hold on his arm. He stood at her table and read it, and laid it down without a word, but glancing aside at her pleading face, he was moved to kiss her, and then promptly effected his escape from her tyranny. He was not displeased, and Bessie was triumphant.

"Now we can begin to be friends," she cried

softly, clapping her hands. "I refuse to be frightened! I shall always tell him my news, and make him listen. If he is sarcastic, I won't care. He will respect me if I assert my right to be respected, and maintain that my father and mother at Beechhurst have the first and best claim on my love! He shall not recognise them as belonging only to my past life; he shall acknowledge them as belonging to me, always—and Harry too!"

These strong resolutions arising out of that letter from the Forest exhilarated Bessie exceedingly. There was, perhaps, more guile in her than was manifest on slight acquaintance, but it was the guile of a warm, wise heart. All trace of emotion had passed away when she came downstairs, and when her grandfather, assisting her into the carriage, squeezed her fingers confidentially, her new, all-pervading sense of happiness was confirmed and established. And the courage that happiness inspires was her's too.

At Mitford Junction Colonel and Mrs Stokes and Mr Oliver Smith joined their party, and they travelled to Normminster together. The old city was going quietly about its business much as usual when they drove through the streets to the "George," where Mr Cecil Burleigh was to meet his committee, and address the electors out of the big middle bow-window. Miss Jocund's shop was nearly opposite to the inn, and thither the ladies at once adjourned, that Bessie might assume her blue bonnet. The others were already handsomely provided. Miss Jocund was quite at liberty to attend to them at this early hour of the day—her "gentleman" had not come in yet,—and she conducted them to her showroom over the shop with the complacent alacrity of a milliner confident that she is about to give supreme satisfaction. And, indeed, Mrs Stokes cried out with rapture the instant the bonnet filled her eye, that it was "A sweet little bonnet—blue crape and white marabouts!"

Bessie smiled most becomingly as it was tried on, and blushed at herself in the glass, but : "A shower of rain will spoil it," she objected, nodding the downy white feathers that topped the brim. She was proceeding philosophically to tie the glossy broad strings in a bow under her round chin when Miss Jocund stepped hastily to the rescue, and Mrs Betts entered with a curtsey, and a blue silk slip on her arm. "What next?" Bessie demanded of the waiting woman in rosy consternation.

"I am afraid we must trouble you, Miss Fairfax, but not much, I hope," insinuated Miss Jocund with a queer, deprecating humility. "There is a good half hour to spare. Since Eve put on a little cool foliage, female dress has developed so extensively that it is necessary to try some ladies on six times to avoid a misfit. But your figure is perfectly proportioned, and I resolved, for once, to chance it on my knowledge of anatomy, supplemented by an embroidered dress from your

wardrobe. If you *will* be *so* kind—a stitch here and a stitch there, and my delightful duty is accomplished!"

Miss Jocund's speeches had always a touch of mockery, and Bessie, being in excellent spirits, laughed good-humouredly, but denied her request. "No, no," said she, "I will not be so kind. Your lovely blue bonnet would be thrown away if I did not look pleasant under it; and how could I look pleasant after the painful ordeal of trying on?"

Mrs Stokes with raised eyebrows was about to remonstrate, Mrs Betts, with flushed dismay, was about to argue, when Miss Jocund interposed. She entered into the young lady's sentiments. "Miss Fairfax has spoken and Miss Fairfax is right. A pleasant look is the glory of a woman's face; and, without a pleasant look, if I were a single gentleman a woman might wear a coal-scuttle for me!"

At this crisis there occurred a scuffle and commotion on the stairs, and Bessie recognised

a voice she had heard elsewhere, a loud, ineffectual voice, pleading: "Master Justus, Master Justus, you are not to go to your granny in the show-room!" and in Master Justus bounced—lovely, delicious, in the whitest of frilly pinafores, and most boisterous of naughty humours.

Bessie Fairfax stooped down, and opened her arms with rapturous invitation. "Come, oh, you bonny boy!" and she caught him up, shook him, kissed him, tickled him, with an exuberant fun that he evidently shared, and frantically retaliated by pulling down her hair.

This was very agreeable to Bessie, but Miss Jocund looked like an angry sphynx, and as the defeated nurse appeared, she said with suppressed excitement: "Sally, how often must I warn you to keep the boy out of the show-room? Carry him away!" The flaxen cherub was borne off kicking and howling; Bessie looked as if she were being pun-

ished herself, Mrs Stokes stood confounded, Mrs Betts turned red. Only Miss Burleigh seemed unaffected, and inquired simply whose that little boy was. "*Mine, ma'am,*" replied the milliner with an emphasis that forbade further question. But Miss Burleigh's reflective powers were awakened.

Mrs Betts, that woman of resources and experience, standing with the blue silk slip half dropt on the Scotch carpet at her feet, reverted to the interrupted business of the hour as if there had been no break. "And if, when it comes to dressing this evening at Lady Angleby's there's not a thing that fits?" she bitterly suggested.

"I will answer for it that everything fits," said Miss Jocund, recovering herself with more effort. "I have worked on true principles. But"—with a persuasive inclination towards Bessie—"if Miss Fairfax will condescend to inspect my productions, she will gratify me and herself also."

As she spoke Miss Jocund threw open the door of an adjoining room where the said productions were elaborately laid out, and Mrs Stokes ran in to have the first view. Miss Burleigh followed. Bessie, with a rather unworthy distrust, refused to advance beyond the door-way ; but looking in, she beheld clouds upon clouds of blue and white puffery, tulle and tarlatan, and shining breadths of silk of the same delicate hues, with fans, gloves, bows, wreaths, shoes, ribbons, sashes, laces, a portentous confusion. After a few seconds of disturbed contemplation, during which she was lending an ear to the remote shrieks of that darling boy, she said—and surely it was provoking !—“ The half would be better than the whole. I am sorry for you, Mrs Betts, if you are to have all those works of art on your mind till they are worn out.”

“ Indeed, Miss, if you don’t show more feeling, my mind will give way ! ” retorted Mrs

Betts. "It is the first time in my long experience that ever a young lady so set me at defiance as to refuse to try on new dresses. And all one's credit at stake upon her appearance. In a great house like Brentwood, too!"

Those piercing cries continued to rise higher and higher. Miss Jocund, with a vexed exclamation, dropped some piece of finery on which she was beginning to dilate, and vanished by another door. In a minute the noise was redoubled with a passionate intensity; Bessie's eyes filled, she knew that old-fashioned discipline was being administered, and her heart ached dreadfully. She even offered to rush to the rescue, but Mrs Betts intercepted her with a stern: "Better let me do up your hair, Miss," while Mrs Stokes, moved by sympathetic tenderness, whispered: "Stop your ears—it is necessary, *quite* necessary now and then, I assure you!" Oh, did not Bessie know? had she not little brothers? When there was

silence, Miss Jocund returned, and without allusion to the nursery tragedy, resumed her task of displaying the fruits of her toils.

Bessie, with a yearning sigh, composed herself, laid hands on her blue bonnet while nobody was observing, and moved away to an open window in the show-room that commanded the street. Deliberately she tied the strings in the fashion that pleased her, and seated herself to look out where a few men and boys were collecting on the edge of the pavement, to await the appearance of the Conservative candidate at the bow-window over the portico of the "George." Presently Mrs Stokes joined her, shaking her head, and saying with demure rebuke: "You naughty girl! And this is all you care for pretty things?" Miss Burleigh, with more real seriousness, hoped that the pretty things would be right. Miss Jocund came forward with a natural professional anxiety to hear their opinions, and when she saw the bonnet-strings tied, clasped

her hands in acute regret, but said nothing. Mrs Betts, a picture of injured virtue, held herself aloof beyond the sea of finery, gazing across it at her insensible young mistress with eyes of mournful indignation. Bessie felt herself the object of general misunderstanding and reproach, and was stirred up to extenuate her untoward behaviour in a strain of mischievous sarcasm.

“Don’t look so distressed, all of you,” she pleaded. “How can I interest myself to-day in anything but Mr Cecil Burleigh’s address to the electors of Normminster, and my own new bonnet?”

“*That* is very becoming, for a consolation,” said the milliner with an affronted air.

“I think it is,” rejoined Bessie coolly. “And if you will not bedizen me with artificial flowers, and will exonerate me from wearing dresses that crackle, I shall be happy. Did you not promise to give me simplicity and no imitations, Miss Jocund?”

"I cannot deny it, Miss Fairfax. Natural leaves and flowers are my taste, and graceful soft outlines of drapery; but when it is the *mode* to wear tall wreaths of painted calico, and to be hustled off in twenty yards of stiff, cheap tarlatan, most ladies conform to the *mode*, on the axiom that they might as well be out of the world as out of the fashion. And nothing comes up so ugly and outrageous but there are some who will have it in the very extreme."

"I am quite aware of the pains many women take to be displeasing, but I thought you understood that was not 'my style, my taste,'" said Bessie, quoting the milliner's curt query at their first interview.

"I understand now, Miss Fairfax, that there are things here you would rather be without. I will not pack up the tarlatan skirts and artificial flowers. With the two morning silks and two dinner silks and the tulle over the blue slip for a possible dance, perhaps you will

be able to go through your visit to Brentwood?"

"I trust so," said Bessie. "But if I need anything more I will write to you."

There was an odd pause of silence in which Bessie looked out of the window, and the rest looked at one another with a furtive, defeated, amused acknowledgment that this young lady, so ignorant of the world, knew how to take her own part, and would not be controlled in the exercise of her senses by any irregular, usurped authority. Mrs Betts saw her day-dream of perquisites vanish. Both she and Miss Jocund had got their lesson, and they remembered it.

A welcome interruption came with the sound of swift wheels and high-stepping horses in the street, and the ladies pressed forward to see. "Lady Angleby's carriage," said Miss Burleigh as it whirled past, and drew up at the "George." She was now in haste to be gone and join her aunt, but Bessie lingered at

the window to witness the great lady's reception by the gentlemen who came out of the inn to meet her. Mr Cecil Burleigh was foremost, and Mr Fairfax, Mr Oliver Smith, Mr Forbes and several more, yet strangers to Bessie, supported him. One who bowed with extreme deference she recognised, at a second glance, as Mr John Short, her grandfather's companion on his memorable visit to Beechhurst which resulted in her severance from that dear home of her childhood. The sight of him brought back some vexed recollections, but she sighed and shook them off, and on Miss Burleigh's again inviting her to come away to the "George" to Lady Angleby, she rose and followed her.

"Look pleasant," said Miss Jocund, standing by the door as Bessie went out, and Bessie laughed and was obedient.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A QUIET POLICY.

LADY ANGLEBY received Bessie Fairfax with a gracious affability, and if Bessie had desired to avail herself of the privilege, there was a cheek offered her to kiss, but she did not appear to see it. Her mind was running on that boy, and her countenance was blithe as sunshine. Mr Laurence Fairfax came forward to shake hands, and Mr John Short respectfully claimed her acquaintance. They were in a smaller room, adjoining the committee-room, where the majority of the gentlemen had assembled, and Bessie said to Miss Burleigh : “ We should see and hear better in Miss Jocund’s window ”—but Miss Burleigh showed her that Miss Jocund’s window was already filled, and that the gathering on the pavement

was increasing. Soon after twelve it increased fast, with the workmen halting during a few minutes of their hour's release for dinner, but it never became a crowd, and the affair was much flatter than Bessie had expected. The new candidate was introduced by Mr Oliver Smith, who spoke very briefly, and then made way for the candidate himself. Bessie could not see Mr Cecil Burleigh, nor hear his words, but she observed that he was listened to, and jeeringly questioned only twice, and on both occasions his answer was received with cheers.

" You will read his speech in the *Normminster Gazette* on Saturday—or he will tell you the substance of it," Miss Burleigh said. " Extremes meet in polities as in other things, and much of Cecil's creed will suit the root and branch men as well as the fanatics of his own party." Bessie wondered a little, but said nothing—she had thought moderation Mr Cecil Burleigh's characteristic.

A school of young ladies passed without  
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difficulty behind the scanty throng, and five minutes after the speaking was over the street was empty.

“Buller was not there,” said Mr John Short to Mr Oliver Smith, and from the absence of mirth amongst the gentlemen, Bessie conjectured that there was a general sense of failure and disappointment.

Mr Cecil Burleigh preserved his dignified composure, and came up to Bessie, who said : “This is only the beginning ?”

“Only the beginning—the real work is all to do,” said he, and entered into a low-toned exposition thereof quite calmly.

It was at this moment that Mr John Short happening to cast an eye upon the two, received one of those happy inspirations that visit in emergency men of superior resources and varied experience. At Lady Angleby’s behest, the pretty ladies in blue bonnets set out to shop, pay calls in the town, and show their colours, and the agent attached himself to the party.

They all left the "George" together, but it was not long before they divided, and Mr Cecil Burleigh and Bessie, having nowhere particular where they wished to go, wandered towards the Minster. Mr John Short, without considering whether his company might be acceptable, adhered to them, and, at length, boldly suggested that they were not far from the thoroughfare in which the "Red Lion" was situated, and that a word from the aspirant candidate to Buller might not be thrown away.

It was the hour of the afternoon when the host of the "Red Lion" sat at the receipt of news and custom, smoking his pipe after dinner in the shade of an old elm-tree by his own door. He was a burly man, with a becoming sense of his importance and weight in the world, and as honest a desire to do his share in mending it as his betters. He was not to be bought by any of the usual methods of electioneering sale and barter, but he had a

soft place in his heart that Mr John Short knew of, and was not therefore to be relinquished as altogether invulnerable.

Mr Cecil Burleigh could not affect the jocose and familiar, but, perhaps, his plain way of address was a higher compliment to the publican's understanding. "Is it true, Buller, that you balance about voting again for Bradley? Think of it, and see if you cannot return to the old flag!" was all he said.

"Sir, I *mean* to think of it," replied Buller with equal directness. "I'm pleased with what I hear of you, and I like a gentleman, but Bradley explains his puzzling conduct very plausibly—it is no use being factious, and hindering business in the House, as he says. And it can't be denied that there's Tory members in the House as factious as any of them pestilent Radical chaps that get up strikes out of doors. I'm not saying that you would be one of them, sir."

"I hope not. For no party considerations

would I hinder any advance or reform that I believe to be for the good of the country."

"I am glad to hear it, sir—you would be what we call an independent member. My opinion is, sir, that sound progress feels its way, and takes one step at a time, and if it tries to go too fast it overleaps itself."

Mr Cecil Burleigh was not prepared for political disquisition on the pavement in front of the "Red Lion," but he pondered an instant on Mr Buller's platitude as if it were a new revelation, and then said with quiet cordiality : "Well, think of it, and if you decide to give me your support, it will be the more valuable as being given on conviction. Good-day to you, Buller."

The publican had risen, and laid aside his pipe : "Good-day to you, sir," said he, and as Bessie inclined her fair head to him also, he bowed with more confusion and pleasure than could have been expected from the host of a popular tavern.

Mr John Short lingered behind, and as the beautiful young people retired out of hearing, admiringly watched by the publican, the lawyer plied his insinuating craft, and whispered : “ You were always a good-natured man, Buller. Look at those two—*No election, no wedding.*”

“ You don’t say so ! ” ejaculated Buller with kindly sympathy in his voice. “ A pretty pair, indeed, to run in a curricle ! I should think now his word’s as good as his bond—eh ? —egad, then, I ’ll give ’em a plumper ! ”

The agent shook hands with him on it delighted. “ You are a man of your word too, Buller. I thank you,” he said with fervour, and felt that this form of bribery and corruption had many excuses besides its success. He did not intend to divulge by what means the inn-keeper’s pledge had been obtained, lest his chief might not quite like it, and with a few nods, becks, and half-words, he ensured Buller’s silence on the delicate family arrangement that he had so prematurely confided to his ear.

And then he went back to the "George" with the approving conscience of an agent who has done his master good secret service without risking any impeachment of his honour. He fully expected that time would make his words true. Unless in that confidence Mr John Short was not the man to have spoken them, even to win an election.

Mr Cecil Burleigh and Miss Fairfax strolled a little farther, and then retraced their steps to the Minster, and went in to hear the anthem. Presently appeared in the distance Mr Fairfax and Miss Burleigh, and when the music was over, signed to them to come away. Lady Angleby was waiting in the carriage at the great south door to take them home, and in the beautiful light of the declining afternoon they drove out of the town to Brentwood—a big, square, convenient old house, surrounded by a pleasant garden divided from the high road by a belt of trees.

Mrs Betts was already installed in the

chamber allotted to her young lady, and had spread out the pretty new clothes she was to wear. She was deeply serious, and not disposed to say much after her morning's lesson. Bessie had apparently dismissed the recollection of it. She came in, all good-humour and cheerfulness. She hummed a soft little tune, and, for the first time, submitted patiently to the assiduities of the experienced waiting-woman. Mrs Betts did not fail to make her own reflections thereupon, and to interpret favourably Miss Fairfax's evidently happy pre-occupation.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A DINNER AT BRENTWOOD.

THERE was rejoicing at Brentwood that evening. All the guests staying in the house were assembled in the drawing-room before dinner when Mr Oliver Smith, who had retained quarters at the "George," walked in with an appearance of high satisfaction, and immediately began to say : "I bring you good news. Buller has made up his mind to do the right thing, Burleigh, and give you a plumper. He hailed my cab as I was passing the 'Red Lion' on my road here, and told me his decision. Do you carry witchcraft about with you ?"

"Buller could not resist the old name and the old colours—Miss Fairfax is my witchcraft," said Mr Cecil Burleigh with a profound

bow to Bessie, in gay acknowledgment of her unconscious services.

Bessie blushed with pleasure, and said : "Indeed, I never opened my mouth."

" Oh, charms work in silence," said Mr Oliver Smith.

Lady Angleby was delighted ; Mr Fairfax looked gratified, and gave his granddaughter an approving nod.

The next and last arrivals were Mr and Mrs Chiverton. Mr Chiverton was known to all present, but the bride was a stranger except to one or two. She was attired in rich white silk—in full dress—so terribly trying to the majority of women, and Bessie Fairfax's first thought on seeing her again was how much less beautiful she was than in her simple *percale* dresses at school. She did not notice Bessie at once, but when their eyes met, and Bessie smiled, she ran to embrace her with expansive cordiality. Bessie, her beaming comeliness notwithstanding, could assume, in an instant, a touch-me-not air,

and gave her hand only, though that with a kind frankness ; and then they sat down and talked of Caen.

Mrs Chiverton's report as a woman of extraordinary beauty and virtue had preceded her into her husband's country, but to the general observer Miss Fairfax was much more pleasing. She also wore full dress—white relieved with blue—but she was also able to wear it with a grace ; for her arms were lovely, and all her contours fair, rounded, and dimpled, while Mrs Chiverton's tall frame, though very stately, was very bony, and her little head and pale classical face, her brown hair not abundant, and eyes too cold and close together, with that expression of intense pride which is a character in itself, required a taste cultivated amidst statuary to appreciate. This taste Mr Chiverton possessed, and his wife satisfied it perfectly.

Bessie looked at Mr Chiverton with curiosity and looked quickly away again, retaining an impression of a cur-like face with a fixed sneer

upon it. He was not engaged in conversation at the time—he was contemplating his handsome wife with critical admiration, as he might have contemplated a new acquisition in his gallery of antique marbles. In his eyes the little girl beside her was a mere golden-haired, rosy, plump rustic, who served as a foil to his wife's Minerva-like beauty.

Lady Angleby was great lady enough to have her own bye-laws of etiquette in her own house, and her nephew was assigned to take Miss Fairfax to dinner. They sat side by side, and were wonderfully sociable at one end of the table, with the hostess and Mr Fairfax facing them at the other. Besides the guests already introduced, there was one other gentleman, very young, Sir Edward Lucas, whose privilege it was to escort Mrs Chiverton. Mr Forbes gave his arm to Miss Burleigh. Mr Chiverton and Mr Oliver Smith had no ladies—Lady Angleby liked a preponderance of gentlemen at her entertainments. Every-

body talked and was pleasant, and Bessie Fairfax felt almost at ease ; so fast does confidence grow in the warm atmosphere of courtesy and kindness. When the ladies retired to the drawing-room she was bidden to approach Lady Angleby's footstool, and treated caressingly ; while Mrs Chiverton was allowed to converse on philanthropic missions with Miss Burleigh, who yawned behind her fan, and marvelled at the splendour of the bride's jewels.

In the dining-room conversation became more animated when the gentlemen were left to themselves. Mr Chiverton loved to take the lead. He had said little during dinner, but now he began to talk with vivacity, and was heard with the attention that must be paid to an old man possessed of enormous wealth, and the centre of great connections. He was accustomed to this deference, and cared, perhaps, for none other.—He had a vast contempt for his fellow-creatures, and was him-

self almost universally detested. But he could bear it, sustained by the bitter tonic of his own numerous aversions. One chief aversion was present at this moment in the elegant person of Mr Oliver Smith. Mr Oliver Smith was called not too strong in the head, but he was good, and possessed the irresistible influence of goodness. Mr Chiverton hated his mild tenacity. His own temper was purely despotic. He had represented a division of the county for several years, and had finally retired from Parliament in dudgeon at the success of the Liberal party and policy. After some general remarks on the approaching election came up the problem of reconciling the quarrel between labour and capital, then already growing to such proportions that the whole community, alarmed, foresaw that it might have ere long to suffer with the disputants. The immediate cause of the reference was the fact of a great landowner, named Gifford, having asked for soldiers from Normminster to aid his farmers in

gathering in the harvest, which was both early and abundant. The request had been granted. The dearth of labour on his estates arose from various causes, but primarily from there not being cottages enough to house the labourers, his father and he having both pursued the policy of driving them to a distance to keep down the rates.

“The penuriousness of rich men is a constant surprise to me,” said Mr Forbes. “Dunghill cottages are not so frequent as they were, but there are still a vast number too many. When old Gifford made a solitude round him, Blagg built those reed-thatched hovels at Morte which contribute more poor rogues to the Quarter Sessions than all the surrounding parishes. That strip of debatable land is the seed-bed of crime and misery —the labourers take refuge in the hamlet, and herd together as animals left to their own choice never do herd ; but their walk to and from their work is shortened by one half, and

they have their excuse—we should probably do the same ourselves."

"The cottages of the small proprietors are always the worst," remarked Mr Chiverton.

"If you and Gifford would combine to rebuild the houses you have allowed to decay or have pulled down, Morte would soon be left to the owls and the bats," said the clergyman. "By far the larger majority of the men are employed on your farms, and it is no longer for your advantage that their strength should be spent in walking miles to work—if ever it was. You will have to do it. While Jack was left in brute ignorance, it was possible to satisfy him with brute comforts, and control him with brute discipline; but teach Jack the alphabet, and he becomes as shrewd as his master. He begins to consider what he is worth, and to re-adjust the proportion between his work and his wages—to reflect that the larger share of the profit is, perhaps, due to himself, seeing that he reaps by his

own toil and sweat, and his master reaps by the toil and sweat of a score."

Mr Chiverton had manifested signs of impatience and irritability during Mr Forbes' address, and he now said with his peculiar snarl, for which he was famous : "Once upon a time there was a great redistribution of land in Egypt, and the fifth part of the increase was given to Pharaoh, and the other four parts were left to be food to the sowers. If Providence would graciously send us a universal famine, we might all begin again on a new foundation."

"Oh, we cannot wait for that, we must do something meanwhile," said Sir Edward Lucas, understanding him literally. "I expect we shall have to manage our land less exclusively with an eye to our own revenue from it"—

Mr Chiverton testily interrupted the young man's words of wisdom : "The fact is, Jack wants to be master himself—strikes in the manufacturing towns are not unnatural ; we

know how those mercantile people grind their hands—but since it has come to strikes amongst colliers and miners, I tremble at the prospect for the country. The spirit of insubordination will spread and spread until the very plough-boys in the field are infected."

"A good thing, too, and the sooner the better," said Mr Oliver Smith.

"No! no!" cried Mr Fairfax, but Mr Forbes said that was what they were coming to. Sir Edward Lucas listened hard. He was fresh from Oxford, where boating and athletic exercises had been his chief study. His father was lately dead, and the administration of a great estate had devolved upon him. His desire was to do his duty by it, and he had to learn how; that prospect not having been prepared for in his education, further than by initiation in the field-sports followed by gentlemen.

Mr Chiverton turned on Mr Oliver Smith with his snarl: "Your conduct as a landowner

being above reproach, you can afford to look on with complacency while the rest of the world are being set by the ears."

Mr Oliver Smith had very little land, but as all there knew what he had as well as he knew himself, he did not wince. He rejoined : " As a class, we have had a long opportunity for winning the confidence of the peasants ; some of us have used it—others of us have neglected it and abused it. If the people these last have held lordship over revolt and transfer their allegiance to other masters—to demagogues hired in the streets—who shall blame them ? "

" Suppose we all rise above reproach—I mean to try," said Sir Edward Lucas with an eagerness of interest that showed his good-will. " Then, if my people can find a better master, let them go."

Mr Cecil Burleigh turned to the young man. " It depends upon yourself whether they shall find a better master or not. Resolve that they

shall not. Consider your duty to the land and those upon it as the vocation of your life, and you will run a worthy career."

Sir Edward was at once gratified and silenced. Mr Cecil Burleigh's reputation was greater yet than his achievement, but a man's possibilities impress the young and enthusiastic even more than his successes accomplished.

"You hold subversive views, Burleigh—views to which the public mind is not educated up, nor will be in this generation," said Mr Chiverton. "The old order of things will last my time."

"Changes move fast now-a-days," said Mr Fairfax. "I should like to see a constitutional remedy provided for the Giffords of the gentry before I depart. We are too near neighbours to be friends; and Morte adjoins my property."

"Gifford was brought up in a bad school, a

vapouring fellow, not true to any of his obligations," said Mr Oliver Smith.

"It is Blagg, his agent, who is responsible," began Mr Chiverton.

Mr Oliver Smith interrupted contemptuously: "When a landlord permits an agent to represent him without supervision, and refuses to look into the reiterated complaints of his tenants, he gives us leave to suppose that his agent does him acceptable service."

"I have remonstrated with him myself, but he is cynically indifferent to public opinion," said Mr Forbes.

"The public opinion that condemns a man and dines with him is not of much account," said Mr Oliver Smith, with a glance at Mr Chiverton—the obnoxious Gifford's very good friend.

"Would you have him cut?" demanded Mr Chiverton. "I grant you that it is a necessary precaution to have his words in black and white if he is to be bound by them"—

" You could not well say worse of a gentleman than that, Chiverton—eh ? " suggested **Mr Fairfax.**

There was a minute's silence, and then Mr Forbes spoke : " I should like our legal appointments to include advocates of the poor, men of integrity whose business it would be to watch over the rights, and listen to the grievances, of those classes who live by laborious work, and are helpless to resist powerful wrong. Old truth bears repeating—these are the classes who maintain the state of the world—the labourer that holds the plough and whose talk is of bullocks, the carpenter, the smith, and the potter—all these trust to their hands, and are wise in their work ; and when oppression comes they must seek to some one of leisure for justice. It is a pitiful thing to hear a poor man plead : ' Sir, what can I do ? ' when his heart burns with a sense of intolerable wrong, and to feel that the best advice

you can give him is that he should bear it patiently."

"I call that too sentimental on your part, Forbes," remonstrated Mr Chiverton. "The labourers are quiet yet, and guidable as their own oxen, but look at the trades—striking everywhere. Surely your smiths and carpenters are proving themselves strong enough to protect their own interests."

"Yes ; by the combination that we should all deprecate amongst our labourers—only by that. Therefore the wise will be warned in time, for such example is contagious. Many of our people have lain so long in discontent, that bitter distrust has come of it, and they are ready to abandon their natural leaders for any leader who promises them more wages and less toil. If the labourers strike, Smith's and Fairfax's will probably stick to their furrows, and Gifford's will turn upon him—yours too, Chiverton, perhaps." Mr Forbes was very bold.

"God forbid that we should come to that!" exclaimed Mr Fairfax devoutly. "We have all something to mend in our ways. Our view of the responsibility that goes with the possession of land has been too narrow. If we could put ourselves in the labourer's place."

"I shall mend nothing! No John Hodge shall dictate to me!" cried Mr Chiverton in a sneering fury. "A man has a right to do what he likes with his own, I presume?"

"No, he has not—and especially not when he calls a great territory in land his own," said Mr Forbes. "That is the false principle out of which the bad practice of some of you arises. A few have never been guided by it—they have acted on the ancient law that the land is the Lord's, and the profit of the land for all—and many more begin to acknowledge that it is a false principle by which it is not safe to be guided any longer. Pushed as far as it will go, the result is Gifford."

"And myself," added Mr Chiverton in a

quieter voice, as he rose from his chair. Mr Forbes looked at him. The old man made no sign of being affronted, and they went together into the drawing-room, where he introduced the clergyman to his wife, saying, "Here, Ada, is a gentleman who will back you in teaching me my duty to my neighbour"—and then he went over to Lady Angleby.

"You are on the side of the poor man then, Mrs Chiverton," said Mr Forbes pleasantly. "It is certainly a legitimate sphere of female influence in country neighbourhoods."

The stately bride drew her splendid dress aside to make room for him on the ottoman, and replied in a measured voice : "I am. I tell Mr Chiverton that he does not satisfy the reasonable expectations of his people. I hope to persuade him to a more liberal policy of management on his immense estates—his revenue from them is very large. It distresses me to

be surrounded by a discontented tenantry as it would do to be waited on by discontented servants. A bad cottage is an eye-sore on a rich man's land, and I shall not rest until I get all Chiver-Chase cleared of bad cottages, and picturesquely inconvenient old farmsteads. The people appeal to me already."

Bessie Fairfax had come up while her old school-fellow was gratifying Mr Forbes' ears with her admirable sentiments. She could not forbear a smile at the candid assertion of power they implied, and as Mr Forbes smiled too with a twinkle of amused surprise, Bessie said sportively: "And if Mr Chiverton is rebellious, and won't take them away—then what shall you do ?"

Mrs Chiverton was dumb—perhaps this probability had not occurred to her ruling mind. Mr Forbes begged to know what Miss Fairfax herself would do under such circumstances. Bessie considered a minute with

her pretty chin in the air, and then said : " I would not wear my diamonds—oh, I would find out a way to bring him to reason ! "

A delicate colour suffused Mrs Chiverton's face, and she looked proudly at Bessie, standing in her bright freedom before her. Bessie caught her breath—she saw that she had given pain, and was sorry. " You don't care for my nonsense—you remember me at school," she whispered, and laid her hand impulsively on the slim folded hands of the young married lady.

" I remember that you found something to laugh at in almost everything—it is your way," said Mrs Chiverton coldly ; and as her flush subsided she appeared paler than before. She was so evidently hurt by something understood or imagined in Bessie's innocent railing, that Bessie, abashed herself, drew back her hand, and as Mr Forbes began to speak with becoming seriousness, she took the oppor-

tunity of gliding away to join Miss Burleigh in the glazed verandah.

It was a dark, warm night, but the moon that was rising above the trees gradually illumined it, and made the garden mysterious with masses of shadow, black against the silver light. In the distance rose the ghostly towers of the cathedral. Miss Burleigh feared that the grass was too wet for them to walk upon it, but they paced the verandah until Mr Cecil Burleigh found them, and the rising hum of conversation in the drawing-room announced the appearance of the other gentlemen. Miss Burleigh then went back to the company, and there was an opportunity for kind words and soft whisperings between the two who were left, if either had been thereto inclined; but Bessie's frank, girlish good-humour made lovers' pretences impossible, and while Mr Cecil Burleigh felt every hour that he liked her better, he felt it more difficult to imply it in his

behaviour. Bessie, on her side, fully possessed with the idea that she knew the lady of his love, was fast throwing off all sense of embarrassment in his kindness to herself ; while onlookers, pre-disposed to believe what they wished, interpreted her growing ease as an infallible sign that his progress with her was both swift and sure.

They were still at the glass-door of the verandah when Mrs Chiverton sought Bessie to bid her good-night. She seemed to have forgotten her recent offence, and said : " You will come and see me, Miss Fairfax, will you not ? We ought to be friends here."

" Oh yes ! " cried Bessie, who, when compunction touched her, was ready to make liberal amends. " I shall be very glad."

Mrs Chiverton went away satisfied. The other guests not staying in the house soon followed, and when all were gone there was some discussion of the bride amongst those who were left. They were of one consent that she

was very handsome, and that her jewels were most magnificent.

"But no one envies her, I hope?" said Lady Angleby.

"You do not admire her motive for the marriage? Perhaps you do not believe in it?" said Mr Cecil Burleigh.

"I quite believe that she does—but I do not commend her example for imitation."

Miss Burleigh lingering a few minutes in Miss Fairfax's room when they went upstairs delivered her mind on the matter. "My poor ambition flies low," she said. "I could be content to give love for love, and do my duty in the humblest station God might call me to; but not for any sake could I go into the house of bondage where no love is. Poor Mrs Chiverton!"

Bessie made a very unsentimental reply: "Poor Mrs Chiverton, indeed! Oh, but she does not want our pity! That old man is a slave to her, just as the girls were at school.

She adores power, and if she is allowed to help and patronise people, she will be perfectly happy in her way. Everybody does not care, first and last, to love and be loved. I have been so long away from everybody who loves me that I am learning to do without it."

"Oh, my dear, don't fancy that," said Miss Burleigh, and she stroked Bessie's face, and kissed her. "Some of us here are longing to love you quite as tenderly as any friends you have in the Forest." And then she bade her good-night, and left her to her ruminations.

Miss Burleigh's kiss brought a blush to Bessie's face that was slow to fade even though she was alone. She sat thinking, her hands clasped, her eyes dreamily fixed on the flame of the candle. Some incidents on board the *Foam* recurred to her mind, and the blush burnt more hotly. Then, with a sigh, she said to herself: "It is pleasant here, everybody is good to me, but I wish I could wake up at Beechhurst to-morrow morning, and have a ride with

my father, and mend socks with my mother in the afternoon. There one felt *safe*."

There was a knock at the door, and Mrs Betts entered, complacent with the flattering things that had been said of her young lady in the steward's room, and willing to repeat them on the smallest encouragement. "Miss Jocund is really cleverer than could have been supposed, Miss. Your white silk fits most beautiful," she began.

"I was not conscious of being newly dressed to-night, so her work must be successful," replied Bessie, untying the black velvet round her fair throat. Mrs Betts took occasion to suggest that a few more ornaments would not be amiss. "I don't care for ornaments—I am fond of my old cross," Bessie said, laying it in the rosy palm of her hand. Then looking up with a melancholy, reflective smile, she said : "All the shining stones in the world would not tempt me to sacrifice my liberty"—Mrs Chiverton was in her thoughts, and Lady

Latimer. Mrs Betts had a shrewd discernment, and she was beginning to understand her young lady's character, and to respect it. She had herself a vein of feeling deeper than the surface ; she had seen those she loved suffer, and she spoke in reply to Miss Fairfax with heartfelt solemnity.

"It is a true thing, Miss, and nobody has better cause than me to know it, that happiness does not belong to rank and riches. It belongs nowhere for certain, but them that are good have most of it. For let the course of their lives run ever so contrary, they have a peace within, given by One above, that the proud and craving never have. Mr Frederick's wife—she bears the curse that has been in her family for generations, but she had a pious bringing-up, and, poor lady, though her wits forsook her, her best comfort never did."

"Some day, Mrs Betts, I shall ask you to tell me her story," Bessie said.

"There is not much to tell, Miss. She was

the second Miss Lovel—her sister and she were co-heiresses—not to say a beauty, but a sweet young lady, and there was a true attachment between her and Mr Frederick. It was in this very house they met—in this very house he slept after that ball where he asked her to marry him. It is not telling secrets to tell how happy she was. Your grandfather, the old Squire, would have been better pleased had it been some other lady, because of what was in the blood, but he did not offer to stop it, and they lived at Abbotsmead after they were married—the house was all new done-up to welcome her—that octagon parlour was her design. She brought Mr Frederick a great fortune, and they loved one another dearly ; but it did not last long. She had a baby, and lost it, and was never quite herself after—poor thing ! poor thing ! ”

“ And my Uncle Laurence’s wife,” said Bessie—not to dwell on that tragedy of which she knew the issue.

"Oh ! Mr Laurence's wife !" said Mrs Betts in a quite changed tone. "I never pitied a gentleman more ! Folks who don't know ladies fancy they speak and behave pretty always, but that lady would grind her teeth in her rages, and make us fly before her —him too. She would throw whatever was in her reach. She was a deal madder and more dangerous in her fits of passion than poor Mrs Frederick—she, poor dear, had a delusion that she was quite destitute, and dependent on charity ; and when she could get out she would go to the cottages, and beg a bit of bread. A curious delusion, Miss, but it did not distress her ; for she called herself one of God's poor, and was persuaded He would take care of her. But it was very distressing to those she belonged to. Twice she was lost. She wandered away so far once that it was a month and over before we got her back. She was found in Edinburgh—after that Mr Fre-

derick consented to her being taken care of—he never would before."

"O Mrs Betts! don't tell me any more; or it will haunt me!"

"Life's a sorrowful tale, Miss, at best, unless we have love here, and a hope beyond."

## CHAPTER X.

### A MORNING AT BRENTWOOD.

BRENTWOOD was a comfortable house to stay in for visitors who never wanted a moment's repose. Lady Angleby lived in the midst of her guests—must have their interest, their sympathy, in all her occupations, and she was never without a press of work and correspondence. Bessie Fairfax by noon next day felt herself weary without having done anything but listen with folded hands to tedious dissertations on matters political and social that had no interest for her. Since ten o'clock Mr Cecil Burleigh and Mr Fairfax had withdrawn themselves, and were gone into Norminster, and Miss Burleigh sat, a patient victim, with two dark hollows under her eyes—bearing up with a smile, while ready to sink

with fatigue. The gentlemen did not return to luncheon, but a caller dropt in, a clergyman, Mr Jones ; and Miss Burleigh took the opportunity of his entrance to vanish, making a sign to Miss Fairfax to come too. They went into the garden, where they were met by a vivacious, pretty old lady, Miss Hague, a former governess of Miss Burleigh, who now acted as assistant secretary to Lady Angleby.

“ Your enemy, Mr Jones, is in the drawing-room with my aunt,” Miss Burleigh told her. “ Quite by chance—he was not asked.”

“ Oh, let him stay. It is a study to see him amble about her ladyship with the airs and graces of a favourite, and then to witness his condescension to inferior persons like me,” said Miss Hague. “ I ’ll go to your room, Mary, and take off my bonnet.”

“ Do, dear. We have only just escaped into the fresh air, and are making the most of our liberty.”

Miss Hague lodged within a stone’s-throw of

Brentwood, and Lady Angleby was good in bidding her go to luncheon whenever she felt disposed. She was disposed as seldom as courtesy allowed ; for though very poor, she was a gentlewoman of independent spirit, and her ladyship sometimes forgot it. She was engaged seeking some report amongst her papers when Miss Hague entered ; but she gave her a nod of welcome. Mr Jones said : “ Ah, Miss Hague,” with superior affability, and luncheon was announced.

Lady Angleby had to give and hear opinions on a variety of subjects while they were at table. Middle-class female education Mr Jones had not gone into—he listened and was instructed, and supposed that it might easily be made better ; nevertheless, he had observed that the best taught amongst his candidates for confirmation came from the shop-keeping class, where the parents still gave their children religious lessons at home. Then, ladies of refined habits and delicate feelings as mistresses of

elementary schools—that was a new idea to him—a certain robustness seemed, perhaps, more desirable; teaching a crowd of imperfectly washed little boys and girls was not fancy-work; also he believed that essential propriety existed to the full as much amongst the young women now engaged as amongst young ladies. If the object was to create a class of rural school-mistresses who would take social rank with the curate, he thought it a mistake; a school-mistress ought not to be above drinking her cup of tea in a tidy cottage with the parents of her pupils—he should prefer a capable young woman in a clean holland apron with pockets and no gloves, to any poor young lady of genteel tastes who would expect to associate on equal terms with his wife and daughters.—Then, cookery for the poor—here Mr Jones fell inadvertently into a trap. He said that the chief want amongst the poor was something to cook—there was very little spending in twelve shillings a week, or even in

fifteen and eighteen, with a family to house, clothe, and feed. Lady Angleby held a quite opposite view. She said that a helpless thriftlessness was at the root of the matter. She had printed and largely distributed a little book of receipts, for which many people had thanked her. Mr Jones knew the little book, and had heard his wife say that Lady Angleby's receipt for stewed rabbits was well enough, but that her receipt for hares stewed with onions was hares spoilt—and where were poor people to get hares unless they went out poaching ?

" I assure your ladyship that agrimony tea is still drunk amongst our widows, and an ounce of shop tea is kept for home-coming sons and daughters, grown proud in service. They gather the herb in the autumn, and dry it in bunches for the winter's use. And many is the labourer who lets his children swallow the lion's share of his Sunday bit of meat because the wife says it makes them strong, and children have not the sense not to want all they see.

Any economical reform amongst the extravagant classes that would leave more and better food within reach of the hard-working classes would be highly beneficial to both. Sometimes I wish we could return to that sumptuary law of Queen Elizabeth which commanded the rich to eat fish and fast from flesh-meat certain days of the week"—here Mr Jones too abruptly paused. Lady Angleby had grown exceedingly red in the face—Bessie Fairfax had grown rosy too, with suppressed reflections on the prize-stature to which her hostess had attained in sixty years of high feeding—Queen Elizabeth's pious fast might have been kept by her with much advantage to her figure.

Poor Mr Jones had confused himself as well as Lady Angleby, but the return to the drawing-room created an opportune diversion. He took up an illustrated paper with a scene from a new play, and after studying it for a few minutes began to denounce the amusements of the gay world in the tone of a man who has

known nothing of them, but has let his imagination run into very queer illusions. This passed harmless. Nobody was concerned to defend the actor's vocation where nobody followed it; but Mr Jones was next so ill-advised as to turn to Miss Hague, and say with a supercilious air that since they last met, he had been trying to read a novel, which he mentioned by name—a master-piece of modern fiction—and really he could not see the good of such works. Miss Hague and he had disagreed on this subject before. She was an inveterate novel-reader, and claimed kindred with a star of chief magnitude in the profession, and to speak lightly of light literature in her presence always brought her out warmly and vigorously in defence and praise of it.

"No good in such works, Mr Jones," cried she. "My hair is grey, and this is a solemn fact—for the conduct of life I have found far more counsel and comfort in novels than in

sermons, in week-day books than in Sunday preachers!"

There was a startled silence. Miss Burleigh extended a gentle hand to stop the impetuous old lady, but the words were spoken, and she could only intervene as moderator. "Novels show us ourselves at a distance, as it were. I think they are good both for instruction and reproof. The best of them are but the scripture parables in modern masquerade. Here is one—the Prodigal Son of the nineteenth century, going out into the world, wasting his substance with riotous living, suffering, repenting, returning, and rejoiced over."

"Our Lord made people think—I am not aware that novels make people think," said Mr Jones with cool contempt.

"Apply your mind to the study of either of these books—Mr Thackeray's or George Eliot's—and you will not find all its powers too much for their appreciation," said Miss Hague.

Mr Jones made a slight grimace: "Pray excuse the comparison, Miss Hague—but you remind me of a groom of mine whom I sent up to the Great Exhibition. When he came home again, all he had to say was: 'Oh, sir, the saddlery was beautiful!'"

"Nothing like leather!" laughed Lady Angleby.

"He showed his wit—he spoke of what he understood," said Miss Hague. "You undertake to despise light literature of which avowedly you know nothing. Tell me—of the little books and tracts that you circulate, which are the most popular?"

"The tales and stories—they are thumbed and blackened when the serious pages are left unread," Mr Jones admitted.

"It is the same with the higher-class periodicals that come to us from d'Oyley's library," said Lady Angleby, pointing to the brown, buff, orange, green, and purple magazines that furnished her round table. "The novels are

well-read, so are the social essays and the bits of gossiping biography ; but dry chapters of exploration, science, discovery, and politics are tasted, and no more—the first page or two may be opened, and the rest as often as not are uncut. And as they come to Brentwood, so, but for myself, they would go away. The young people prefer the stories, and, with rare exceptions, it is the same with their elders. The fact is worth considering. A puff of secular air, to blow away the vapour of sanctity in which the clergy envelop themselves, might be salutary at intervals. All fresh air is a tonic.”

Mr Jones repeated his slight grimace, and said: “ Will Miss Hague be so kind as to tell me what a sermon ought to be—I will sit at her feet with all humility ”—

“ With arrogant humility ! with the pride that apes humility ! ” cried Miss Hague with cheerful irreverence. “ I don’t pretend to teach you sermon-making—I only tell you

that such as sermons mostly are, precious little help or comfort can be derived from them."

Mr Jones again made his characteristic grimace, expressive of the contempt for secular opinion with which he was morally so well-cushioned, but he had a kind heart, and refrained from crushing his poor old opponent with too severe a rejoinder. He granted that some novels might be harmless, and such as he would not object to see in the hands of his daughters ; but as a general rule he had a prejudice against fiction, and as for theatres, he would have them all shut up ; for he was convinced that thousands of young men and women might date their ruin from their first visit to a theatre—he could tell them many anecdotes in support of his assertions. Fortunately it was three o'clock. The butler brought in letters by the afternoon post, and the anecdotes had to be deferred to a more convenient season. The clergyman took his leave.

Lady Angleby glanced through her sheaf of correspondence, and singled out one letter. "From dear Lady Latimer," she said, and tore it open. But as she read her countenance became exceedingly irate, and at the end, she tossed it over to Miss Hague : "There is the answer to your application." The old lady did not raise her eyes immediately after its perusal, and Miss Burleigh took it kindly out of her hand, saying : "Let me see." Then Lady Angleby broke out : "I do not want anybody to teach me what is my duty, I hope ! "

Miss Hague now looked up, and Bessie Fairfax's kind heart ached to see her bright eyes glittering as she faltered : "I think it is a very kind letter. I wish more people were of Lady Latimer's opinion. I do not wish to enter the Governesses' Asylum—it would take me quite away from all the places and people I am fond of. I might never see any of you again."

"How often must I tell you that it is not

necessary you should go into the Asylum ; you may be elected to one of the out-pensions if we can collect votes enough. As for Lady Latimer reserving her vote for really friendless persons, it is like her affectation of superior virtue ! ” Lady Angleby spoke and looked as if she were highly incensed. Miss Hague was trembling all over, and begging that nothing more might be said on the subject : “ But there is no time to lose,” said her patroness still more angrily. “ If you do not press on with your applications you will be too late—everybody will be engaged for the election in November. The voting-list is on my writing-table, the names I know are marked—go on with the letters in order, and I will sign them when I return from my drive.”

Miss Fairfax’s face was so pitiful and inquisitive that the substance of Lady Latimer’s letter was repeated to her. It was to the effect that Miss Hague’s former pupils were of great and wealthy condition for the most part, and that

they ought not to let her appeal to public charity, but to subscribe a sufficient pension for her amongst themselves ; and out of the respect in which she herself held her, Lady Latimer offered five pounds annually towards it. “ And I think that is right,” said Bessie warmly. “ If you were my old governess, Miss Hague, I should be only too glad to subscribe.”

“ Well, my dear young lady, I was your father’s governess and your uncles’ until they went to a preparatory school for Eton—from Frederick’s being four years old to Geoffry’s being ten, I lived at Abbotsmead,” said Miss Hague—“ And here is another of my boys,” she added as the door opened, and Sir Edward Lucas was announced.

“ Then I will do what my father would have done had he been alive,” said Bessie. “ Perhaps my Uncle Laurence will too”—

“ What were you saying of me, dear Hoddy-doddy ? ” asked Sir Edward, turning to the old lady when he had paid his devoirs to the rest.

The matter being explained to him, he was eager to contribute his fraction. "Then leave the final arrangement to me," said Lady Angleby. "I will settle what is to be done. You need not write any more of those letters, Miss Hague, and I trust these enthusiastic young people will not tire of what they have undertaken. It is right—but if everybody did what is right on such occasions there would be little use for benevolent institutions.—Sir Edward, we were going to drive into Norminster: will you take a seat in my carriage?"

Sir Edward would be delighted; and Miss Hague, released from her ladyship's desk, went home happy, and in the midst of doubts and fears lest she had hurt the feelings of Mr Jones, wept the soft tears of grateful old age that meets with unexpected kindness. The resolute expression of her sentiments by Miss Fairfax had inspired her with confidence, and she longed to see that young lady again. In the

letter of thanks she wrote to Lady Latimer she did not fail to mention how her judgment and example had been supported by that young disciple ; and Lady Latimer, revolving the news with pleasure, began to think of paying a visit to Woldshire.

## CHAPTER XI.

### SOME DOUBTS AND FEARS.

SIR EDWARD LUCAS was a gentleman for whom Lady Angleby had a considerable degree of favour—it was a pity he was so young, otherwise he might have done for Mary. Poor Mary ! Mr Forbes and she had a long, obstinate kindness for each other, but Lady Angleby stood in the way—Mr Forbes did not satisfy any of her requirements—besides, if she gave Mary up, who was to live with her at Brentwood ? Therefore Mr Forbes and Miss Burleigh, after a six years' engagement, still played at patience. She did not drive into Normminster that afternoon. “Mr Fairfax and Cecil will be glad of a seat back,” said she ; and stood excused.

Sir Edward Lucas had more pleasure in

facing his contemporary—Miss Fairfax he regarded as his contemporary. He was smitten with a lively admiration for her, and in course of the drive he sought her advice on important matters. Lady Angleby began to instruct him on what he ought to do for the improvement of his fine house at Longdown, but he wanted to talk rather of a new interest—the mineral wealth still waiting development on his property at Hippesley Moor.

“Now, what should you do, Miss Fairfax, supposing you had to earn your bread by a labour always horribly disagreeable, and never unattended by danger ?” he asked with great eagerness.

Bessie had not a doubt of what she should do. “I should work as hard as ever I could for the shortest possible time that would keep me in bread.”

“Just so,” said Sir Edward rubbing his hands. “So would I. Now, will that principle work amongst colliers ? I am going to

open a pit at Hippesley Moor, where the coal is of excellent quality. It is a fresh start, and I shall try to carry out your principle, Miss Fairfax ; I am convinced that it is excellent and Christian—*Christian.*”

Bessie’s blue eyes widened with laughing alarm : “Oh, had you not better consult somebody of greater experience ?” cried she.

Lady Angleby approved her modesty, and with smiling indulgence remarked : “I should think so, indeed ! ”

“No, no—experience is always for sticking to grooves,” said Sir Edward. “I like Miss Fairfax’s idea. It is shrewd—it goes to the root of the difficulty. We must get it out in detail. Now, if in three days’ hard work the collier can earn the week’s wages of an agricultural labourer, and more—and he can—we have touched the reason why he takes so many play-days. It would be a very sharp spur of necessity, indeed, that would drive

me into a coal-pit at all ; and nothing would keep me there one hour after necessity was satisfied. I shall take into consideration the instinct of our common humanity that craves for some sweetness in life, and, as far as I am able, it shall be gratified. Now, the other three days—what shall be their occupation ? Idleness will not do.”

“ No—I should choose to have a garden, and work in the sun,” said Bessie, catching some of his spirit.

“ And I should choose to tend some sort of live-stock. In the way of minor industries I am convinced that a great deal may be put in their way only by taking thought. I shall lay parcels of land together for spade cultivation—the men will have a market at their own doors—then poultry farms”—

“ Not forgetting the cock-pit for Sunday amusement,” interupted Lady Angleby sarcastically. “ You are too Utopian, Sir Edward.

Your colony will be a dismal failure and disappointment if you conduct it on such a sentimental plan."

Sir Edward coloured—he had a love of approbation, and her ladyship was an authority. He sought to propitiate her better opinion, and resumed: "There shall be no inexorable rule—a man may work his six days in the pit if it be his good-will, but he shall have the chance of a decent existence above ground if he refuse to live in darkness and peril more than three or four. Schools and institutes are very good things in their place, and I shall not neglect to provide them, but I do not expect that more than a slender minority of my colliers will ever trouble the reading-room much. Let them feed pigs and grow roses."

"They will soon not know what they want. The common people grow more exacting every day—even our servants. You will have some fine stories of trouble and vexation to tell us before long."

Sir Edward looked discouraged, and Bessie Fairfax, with her impulsive kind heart, exclaimed: "No! no! In all labour there is profit; and if you work at doing your best for those who depend on your land, you will not be disappointed. Men are not all ungrateful."

Sir Edward certainly was not. He thanked Miss Fairfax energetically, and just then the carriage stopped at "The George." Mr Fairfax and Mr Cecil Burleigh came out in the most cheerful good-humour, and Mr Cecil Burleigh began to tell Bessie that she did not know how much she had done for him by securing Buller's vote—it had drawn others after it. Bessie was delighted, and was not withheld by any foolish shyness from proclaiming that her mind was set on his winning his election.

"You ought to take these two young people into your counsels, Cecil; they have some wonderful devices for the promotion of contentment amongst coal-miners," said Lady Angleby. Mr Fairfax glanced in his grand-

daughter's innocent, rosy face, and shook hands with Sir Edward as he got out of the carriage. Mr Cecil Burleigh said that wisdom was not the monopoly of age, and then he inquired where they were going.

They were going to call at the Manor on Lady Eden, and to wind up with a visit to Mr Laurence Fairfax in the Minster Court. Mr Fairfax said he would meet them there, and the same said Mr Cecil Burleigh. Sir Edward Lucas stood halting on the inn-steps, wistfully hoping for a bidding to come too. Lady Angleby was even kinder than his hopes ; she asked if he had any engagement for the evening, and when he answered in the negative, she invited him to come and dine at Brentwood again. He accepted with joy unfeigned.

When the ladies reached Minster Court only Mr Cecil Burleigh had arrived there. Lady Angleby was impatient to hear some private details of the canvass, and took her nephew aside to talk of it. Mr Laurence Fairfax began

to ask Bessie how long she was to stay at Brentwood. "Until Monday," Bessie said; and her eyes roved unconsciously to the cupboard under the book-case where the toys lived; but it was fast shut and locked, and gave no sign of its hid treasures. Her uncle's eyes followed her's, and with a significant smile he said, if she pleased, he would request her grandfather to leave her with him for a few days, adding that he would find her some young companions. Bessie professed that she would like it very much, and when Mr Fairfax came in the request was preferred and cordially granted. The Squire was in high good-humour with his granddaughter and all the world just now.

Bessie went away from Minster Court with jubilant anticipations of what might happen during the proposed visit to her uncle's house. One thing she felt sure of, she would become better acquainted with that darling cherub of a boy, and the vision she made of it shed quite a

glow on the prospect. She told Miss Burleigh when she returned to Brentwood that she was not going out of reach on Monday—she was going to stay a few days with her Uncle Lawrence in Minster Court.

“Cecil will be so glad!” said his devoted sister.

“There are no more Bullers to conquer, are there?” Bessie asked, turning her face aside.

“I hope not. Oh no! Cecil begins to be tolerably sure of his election—and he will have you to thank for it. Mr John Short blesses you every hour of the day.”

Bessie laughed lightly: “I did good unconsciously, and blush to find it fame!” said she.

A fear that her brother’s success with Miss Fairfax might be doubtful, though his election was sure, flashed at that instant into Miss Burleigh’s mind. Bessie’s manner was not less charming, but it was much more intrepid, and

at intervals there was a strain of fun in it—of mischief and mockery. Was it the sub-acid flavour of girlish caprice, which might very well subsist in combination with her sweetness, or was it sheer insensibility ? Time would show ; but Miss Burleigh retained a lurking sense of uneasiness, akin to that she had experienced when she detected in Miss Fairfax, at their first meeting, an inclination to laugh at her aunt—an uneasiness difficult to conceal, and dangerous to confess. Not for the world would she, at this stage of the affair, have revealed her anxiety to her brother, who held the even tenor of his way whatever he felt—never obtrusive and never negligent. He treated Bessie like the girl of sense she was, with courtesy but without compliments, or any idle banter ; and Bessie certainly began to enjoy his society. He improved on acquaintance, and made the hours pass much more pleasantly at Brentwood when he was there than they passed in his absence. This was promising

The evening's dinner party would have been undeniably heavy without the leaven of his wit; for Mr Logger, that well-known political writer, had arrived from London in the course of the afternoon, and Lady Angleby and he discoursed with so much solemn allusion and innuendo on the affairs of the nation that it was like listening surreptitiously at a cabinet council. Sir Edward Lucas was quite silent and oppressed.

Coming into the morning-room after breakfast on the following day armed with a roll of papers, Mr Logger announced : "I met our excellent friend Lady Latimer at Summerhay last week—she is immensely interested in the education movement."

Mr Fairfax and Mr Cecil Burleigh instantly discovered that it was time they were gone into the town ; and with one compunctionious glance at Bessie, of which she did not yet know the meaning, they vanished. The roll in Mr Logger's hand was an article in manuscript on that education movement in which he had

stated that his friend Lady Latimer was so immensely interested ; and he had the cruelty to propose to read it to the ladies here. He did read it, his hostess listening with gratified approval, and keeping a controlling eye on Miss Fairfax, who, when she saw what impended, would have escaped had she been able. Miss Burleigh bore it as she bore everything—with smiling resignation, but she enjoyed the vivacity of Bessie's declaration afterwards that the lecture was unpardonable.

"What a shockingly vain old gentleman ! Could we not have waited to read his article in print ?" said she.

"Probably it will never be in print. He toadies my aunt, who likes to be credited with a literary taste, but Cecil says people laugh at him ; he is not of any weight ; either literary or political, though he has great pretensions. We shall have him for a week, at least, and I have no doubt he has brought manuscript to last the whole time."

Bessie was so uncomfortably candid as to cry out that she was glad, then, her visit would soon be over; and then she tried to extenuate her plain-speaking, not very skilfully. Miss Burleigh accepted her plea with a gentleness that reproached her.

"We hoped that you would be happy at Brentwood with Cecil here—his company is generally supposed to make any place delightful. He is exceedingly dear to us all; no one knows how good he is until they have lived with him a long while"—

"Oh, I am sure he is good; I like him much better now than I did at first; but if he runs away to Normminster, and leaves us a helpless prey to Mr Logger, that is not delightful," rejoined Bessie winsomely.

Miss Burleigh kissed and forgave her; acknowledged that it was the reverse of delightful, and conveyed an intimation to her brother by which he profited. Mr Logger favoured the ladies with another reading on Sunday

afternoon, an essay on sermons, and twice as long as one. Mr Jones should have been there —this essay was much heavier artillery than Miss Hague's little paper-winged arrows. In the middle of it, just at the moment when endurance became agony, and release bliss, Mr Cecil Burleigh entered, and invited Miss Fairfax to walk into the town to Minster prayers, and Bessie went so gladly that his sister was quite consoled in being left to hear Mr Logger to an end.

The two were about to ascend the Minster steps when they espied Mr Fairfax in the distance, and turned to meet him. He had been lunching with his son. At the first glance Bessie knew that her grandfather had suffered an overwhelming surprise since he went out in the morning. Mr Cecil Burleigh also perceived that something was amiss, and not to distress his friend by inopportune remark he said where he and Miss Fairfax were going.

"Go—go, by all means," said the Squire.

"Perhaps you may overtake me as you return—I shall walk slowly, and I want a word with Short as I pass his house." With this he went on, and the young people entered the Minster, thinking but not speaking of what they could not but observe—his manifest bewilderment and pre-occupation.

On the road home they did not, however, overtake Mr Fairfax. He reached Brentwood before them, and was closeted with Lady Angleby for some considerable time previous to dinner. Her ladyship was not agreeable without effort that evening, and there was, indeed, a perceptible cloud over everybody but Mr Logger. Whatever the secret, it had been communicated to Mr Cecil Burleigh and his sister, and it affected them all more or less uncomfortably. Bessie guessed what had happened—that her grandfather had seen his son Laurence's little playfellow, and that there had been an important revelation.

Bessie was right. Mr Laurence Fairfax had

Master Justus on his lap when his father unexpectedly walked into his garden. There was a lady in blue amongst the flowers who vanished ; and the incompetent Sally, with something in her arms, who also hastily retired—but not unseen, either her or her burden. Master Justus held his ground with baby audacity, and the old Squire recognised a strong young shoot of the Fairfax stock. One or two sharp exclamations and astounded queries elicited from Mr Laurence Fairfax that he had been five years married to the lady in blue—a niece of Dr Jocund—and that the bold little boy was his own—and another in the nurse's arms. Mr Fairfax did not refuse to sit at meat with his son though the chubby boy sat opposite ; but he declined all conversation on the subject beyond the bald fact, and expressed no desire to be made acquainted with his newly-discovered daughter-in-law. Indeed, at a hint of it, he jerked out a peremptory negative, and left the house without any more reference to

the matter. Mr Laurence Fairfax feared that it would be long before his father would darken his doors again; but it was a sensible relief to have got his secret told, and not to have had any angry, unpardonable words about it. The Squire said little, but those who knew him, knew perfectly that he might be silent, and all the more indignant. And undoubtedly he was indignant. Of his three sons Laurence had been always the one preferred—and this was his usage of him, his confidence in him.

## CHAPTER XII.

### IN MINSTER COURT.

MR FAIRFAX did not withdraw his consent to Elizabeth's staying in Norminster with her Uncle Laurence, and on Monday afternoon she and Mrs Betts were transferred from Brentwood to Minster Court. On the first evening Mr John Short dined there, but no one else. He made Miss Fairfax happy by talking of the Forest, which he had revisited more than once since the famous first occasion. After dinner the two gentlemen remained together a long while, and Bessie amused herself alone in the study. She cast many a look towards the toy-cupboard, and was strongly tempted to peep, but did not ; and in the morning her virtue had its reward. It was a little after eleven o'clock when Burrage threw open the

door of the study where she was sitting with her uncle, and announced : “ The dear children, sir,” in a matter-of-fact tone, as if they were daily visitors.

Bessie’s back was to the door. She blushed, and turned round with brightened eyes, and there, behold, was that sweet little boy in a blue poplin tunic, and a second little boy, a year smaller, in a white embroidered frock and scarlet sash ! The voice of the incompetent Sally was heard in final exhortation : “ Now, mind you be good, Master Justus ! ” and Master Justus ran straight to the philosopher, and saluted him imperatively as : “ Dada ! ” which honourable title the other little boy echoed in an imperfect lisp, with an eager desire to be taken up and kissed. The desire was abundantly gratified, and then Mr Laurence Fairfax said : “ This is Laury,” and offered him to Bessie for a repetition of the ceremonial.

Bessie could not have told why but her eyes filled as she took him into her lap, and took off

his pretty hat to see his shining curly locks. Master Justus was already at the cupboard, dragging out the toys, and her uncle stood and looked down at her with a pleased, benevolent face. "Of course, they are my cousins?" said Bessie simply; and quite as simply, he said: "Yes."

This was all the interrogatory. But games ensued in which Bessie was brought to her knees and a seat on the carpet, and had the beautiful propriety of her hair as sadly disarranged as in her gipsy childhood amongst the rough Carnegie boys. Mrs Betts put it tidy again before luncheon, after the children were gone—Mrs Betts had fathomed the whole mystery, and would have been sympathetic about it had not her young lady manifested an invincible gaiety. Bessie hardly knew herself for joy. She wanted very much to hear the romantic story that must belong to those bonny children, but she felt that she must wait her uncle's time to tell it. Happily for her

peace, the story was not long delayed—she learnt it that evening.

This was the scene in Mr Laurence Fairfax's study. He was seated at ease in his great leather chair, and perched on his knee with one arm round his neck, and a ripe pomegranate cheek pressed against his ear, was that winsome little lady in blue who was to be known henceforward as the philosopher's wife—if she had not been so exquisitely pretty it would have seemed a liberty to take with so much learning. Opposite to them, and grim as a monumental effigy, sat Miss Jocund ; and Bessie Fairfax, with an amazed and amused countenance, listened and looked on. The philosopher and his wife were laughing—they loved one another, they had two dear little boys—what could the world give them or take away in comparison with such joys ? Their secret, long suspected in various quarters, had transpired publicly since yesterday, and Lady Angleby had that morning appealed haughtily to Miss

Jocund in her own shop to know how it had all happened. Miss Jocund now reported what she had answered.

"I reckon, your ladyship, that Dan Cupid is no more open in his tactics than ever he was. All I have to tell is that one evening, some six years ago, my niece Rosy, who was a timid little thing, went for a walk by the river with a school-fellow; and a hulking rude boy gave them a fright. Mr Laurence Fairfax, by good luck, was in the way, and brought them home, and said to me that Rosy was much too pretty to be allowed to wander out unprotected. When they met after he had a kind nod and a word for her, and I've no doubt she had a shy blush for him—a philosopher is but a man, and liable to fall in love, and that is what he did. He fell in love with Rosy and married her. It suited all parties to keep it a secret at first; but a secret is like a birth—when its time is full forth it must come. Two little boys with Fairfax writ large on their faces are

bad to hide. Therefore it suits all parties now to declare the marriage. And that is the whole story, an' it please your ladyship."

"I warrant it did not please her ladyship at all," said Mr Laurence Fairfax, laughing at the recital.

"No. She turned and went away in a rage —then came back to expound her views with respect to Rosy's origin. I begged to inform her that from time immemorial king's jesters had been of the Jocund family—an office to the full as dignified as the office of public barber. And a barber her ladyship's great grandfather was, and shaved his majesty's lieges for a penny. Mr Cecil Burleigh waited for her outside, and to him, immediately, she, of course, repeated the tale. How does it come to be a concern of his, I should be glad to know?" Nobody volunteered to gratify her curiosity, but Mr Laurence Fairfax could have done so, no doubt.

Mr Cecil Burleigh had not visited Minster

Court that day—was this the reason ? Bessie was not absolutely indifferent to the omission, but she had other diversions. That night she went upstairs with the young mother (so young that Elizabeth could not fashion to call her by her title of kindred), to view the boys in their cots, and saw her so loving and tender over them that she could not but reflect how dear a companion she must be to her philosopher after his lost Xantippe. She was such a sweet and gentle lady that though he had chosen to marry her privately, he could have no reluctance in producing her as his wife. He had kept her to himself unspoilt, had much improved her in their retired life ; and as he had no intention of bringing her into rivalry with finer ladies, the charm of her adoring simplicity was not likely to be impaired. He had set his mind on his niece Elizabeth for her friend from the first moment of their meeting, and except Elizabeth, he did not desire that she should find, at present, any intimate friend of

her own sex. And Elizabeth was perfectly ready to be her friend, and to care nothing for the change in her own prospects.

" You know that my boys will make all the difference to you ? " her uncle said to her the next day, being a few minutes alone with her.

" Oh yes, I understand, and I shall be the happier in the end. Abbotsmead will be quite another place when they come over," was her reply.

" There is my father to conciliate before they can come to Abbotsmead. He is deeply aggrieved—and not without cause. You may help to smooth the way to comfortable relations again ; or at least to prevent a widening breach—I count on that because he has permitted you to come here, though he knows that Rosy and the boys are with me. I should not have had any right to complain had he denied us your visit."

" But I should have had a right to complain, and, I should have complained," said Bessie.

My grandfather and I are friends now, because I have plucked up courage to assert my right to respect for myself and my friends who brought me up—otherwise we must have quarrelled soon."

Mr Laurence Fairfax smiled. " My father can be obstinately unforgiving—so he was to my brother Geoffry and his wife. So he may be to me, though we have never had a disagreement."

" I could fancy that he was sometimes sorry for his unkindness to my father. I shall not submit if he attempt to forbid me your house or the joy of seeing my little cousins. Oh, his heart must soften to them soon—I am glad he saw Justus, the darling ! "

Bessie Fairfax had evidently no worldly ambition. All her desire was still only to be loved. Her uncle Laurence admired her unselfishness, and before she left his house at the week's end he had her confidence entirely. He did not place too much reliance on her recollections of Beech-

hurst as the place where she had centred her affections ; for young affections are prone to weave a fine gossamer glamour about early days that will not bear the touch of later experience ; but he was sure there had been a blunder in bringing her into Woldshire without giving her a pause amongst those scenes where her fond imagination dwelt—if only to sweep it clear of illusions, and make room for new actors on the stage of her life. He said to Mr Cecil Burleigh, with whom he had an important conversation during her visit to Minster Court, that he did not believe she would ever give her mind to settling amongst her north-country kindred until she had seen again her friends in the Forest, and Mr Cecil Burleigh began to agree with him. Miss Burleigh did the same.

It was settled already that the recent disclosure must make no alteration in the family compact—Mr Cecil Burleigh interposed a firm veto when its repeal was hinted at. Every afternoon—one excepted—he called on Miss

Fairfax, to report the progress of his canvass, accompanied by his sister, and Bessie always expressed herself glad in his promising success. But it was with a cool cheek and candour shining clear in her blue eyes that she saw them come and saw them go : and both brother and sister felt this discouraging. The one fault they found in Miss Fairfax was an absence of enthusiasm for themselves—and Bessie was so thankful that she had overcome her perverse trick of blushing at nothing ! When she took her final leave of them before quitting Minster Court, Mr Cecil Burleigh said that he should probably be over at Abbotsmead in the course of the ensuing week, and Bessie was glad as usual, and smiled cordially, and hoped that blue would win—as if he were thinking only of the election.

He was thinking of it, and perhaps primarily ; but his interest in herself was becoming so much warmer and more personal than it had promised to be, that it would have given him

distinct pleasure to perceive that she was conscious of it.

The report of Mr Laurence Fairfax's private marriage had spread through city and country, but Bessie went back to Kirkham without having heard it discussed except by Mrs Betts, who was already so deeply initiated in the family secrets. That sage and experienced woman owned frankly to her young mistress that in her judgment it was a very good thing —looked at in the right way.

"A young lady that is a great heiress is more to be pitied than envied—that is my opinion," said she. "If she is not made a sacrifice of in marriage it is a miracle. Men run after her for her money, or she fancies they do, which comes to the same thing; and perhaps, she doesn't marry at all, for suspecting nobody loves her—which is downright foolish. Jonquil and Macky are in great spirits over what has come out, and I don't suppose there is one neighbour to Kirkham that won't

be pleased to hear that there's grandsons, even under the rose, to carry on the old line. Mrs Laurence is a dear sweet lady, and the children are handsome little fellows as ever stepped—their father may well be proud of 'em ! He has done a deal better for himself the second time than he did the first—I daresay it was what he suffered the first time made him choose so different the second. It is not to be wondered at that the Squire is vexed, but he ought to have learnt wisdom now, and it is to be hoped he will come round by and by. But whether or not, the deed's done, and he cannot undo it."

Mrs Betts' summary embodied all the common-sense of the case, and left nothing more to be said.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### LADY LATIMER IN WOLDSHIRE.

MR FAIRFAX welcomed Elizabeth on her arrival with an air of reserve, as if he did not wish to receive any intelligence from Minster Court. Bessie took the hint. The only news he had for her was that she might mount Janey now as soon as she pleased. Bessie was pleased to mount her the next morning, and to enjoy a delightful ride in her grandfather's company. Janey went admirably, and promised to be an immense addition to the cheerfulness of her mistress's life. Mr Fairfax was gratified to see her happy, and they chatted cordially enough—but Bessie did not find it possible to speak of the one thing that lay uppermost in her mind.

In the afternoon Mrs Stokes called, and having had a glimpse of Mr Laurence Fairfax's secret, and heard various reports since, she was curious for a full revelation. Bessie gave her the narrative complete, interspersed with much happy prediction ; and Mrs Stokes declared herself infinitely relieved to hear that, in spite of probabilities, the mysterious wife was a quite presentable person.

" You remember that I told you Miss Jocund was a lady herself," she said. " The Jocunds are an old Normminster family, and we knew a Dr Jocund in India. It was an odd thing for Miss Jocund to turn milliner, still it must be much more comfortable than dependence upon friends. There is nothing so unsatisfactory as helpless poor relations. Colonel Stokes has no end of them ! I wish they would turn milliners, or go into Lady Angleby's scheme of genteel mistresses for national schools, or do anything but hang upon us.

And the worst is, they are never grateful and never done with."

"Are they ashamed to work?"

"No, I don't think shame is in their way, or pride, but sheer incompetence. One is blind, another is a confirmed invalid"—

"Then, perhaps, Providence puts them in your lot for the correction of selfishness," said Bessie laughing. "I believe if we all helped the need that belongs to us by kindred or service, there would be little misery of indigence in the world, and little superfluity of riches even amongst the richest. That must have been the original reading of the old saw that sayeth: 'Charity should begin at home.' "

"Oh, political economy is not in my line!" cried Mrs Stokes also laughing. "You have caught a world of wisdom from Mr Cecil Burleigh, no doubt; but, please, don't shower it on me!"

Bessie did not own the impeachment by a

blush as she would have done a week ago. She could hear that name with composure now, and was proving an apt pupil in the manners of society. Mrs Stokes scanned her in some perplexity, and would have had her discourse of the occupations and diversions of Brentwood; but all Bessie's inclination was to discourse of those precious boys in Minster Court.

"They are just of an age to be play-fellows with your boys," she said to the blooming little matron. "How I should rejoice to see them racing about the garden together!"

Bessie was to wish this often and long before her loving desire was gratified. If she had not been pre-assured that her grandfather did, in fact, know all that was to be known about the children, nothing in his conduct would have betrayed it to her. She told the story in writing to her mother, and received advice of prudence and patience. The days and weeks at Abbotsmead flowed evenly on, and brought no opportunity of asking the favour of a visit

from them. Mr and Mrs Chiverton drove over to luncheon, and Bessie and her grandfather returned the civility ; Sir Edward Lucas came to call and stayed a long time, planning his new town for colliers—Miss Fairfax said a word in praise of steep tiled roofs as more airy than low roofs of slate, and Sir Edward was an easy convert to her opinion. Mr Cecil Burleigh came twice to spend a few days, and brought a favourable report of his canvass ; the second time his sister accompanied him, and they brought the good news that Lady Latimer was at Brentwood, and was coming to Hartwell the following week.

Bessie Fairfax was certainly happier when there was company at Abbotsmead, and she had a preference for Miss Burleigh's company—which might be variously interpreted. Miss Burleigh herself considered Miss Fairfax rather cold, but then Bessie was not expansive unless she loved very fondly and familiarly. One day they fell a-talking of Mr Laurence Fairfax's

wife, and Miss Burleigh suggested a cautious inquiry with a view to obtaining Bessie's real sentiments respecting her. She received the frankest exposition of them, with a bit of information to boot that gave her a theme for reflection.

"I think her a perfect jewel of a wife," said Bessie with genuine kindness. "My Uncle Laurence and she are quite devoted to one another. She sings like a little bird, and it is beautiful to see her with those boys. I wish we had them all at Abbotsmead ! and she is so pretty—the prettiest lady I ever saw—except, perhaps, one."

"And who was that one ?" Miss Burleigh begged to know.

"It was a Miss Julia Gardiner. I saw her first at Fairfield, at the wedding of Lady Latimer's niece, and again at Ryde the other day."

"Oh yes ! dear Julia was very lovely once, but she has gone off. The Gardiners are very

old friends of ours." Miss Burleigh turned aside her face as she spoke—she had not heard before that Miss Fairfax had met her rival and predecessor in Mr Cecil Burleigh's affections—why had her dear Cecil been so rash as to bring them in contact, and give her the opportunity of drawing inferences ? That Bessie had drawn her inferences truly was plain, from a soft blush and glance and a certain tone in her voice as she mentioned the name of Miss Julia Gardiner—as if she would deprecate any possible idea that she was taking a liberty. The subject was not pursued. Miss Burleigh wished only to forget it ; perhaps Bessie had expected a confidential word, and was abashed at hearing none ; for she began to talk with eagerness rather strained of Lady Latimer's promised visit to Hartwell.

Lady Latimer's arrival was signalled by an immediate invitation to Mr Fairfax and his granddaughter to go over and lunch on a fixed day. Bessie was never so impatient as till the

day came, and when she mounted Janey to ride to Hartwell she palpitated more joyously than ever she had done yet since her coming into Woldshire. Her grandfather asked her why she was so glad, but she found it difficult to tell him—because my lady had come from the Forest seemed the root of the matter, as far as it could be expressed. The Squire looked rather glum, Macky remarked to Mrs Betts—and if she had been in his shoes wild horses should not have drawn her into company with that proud Lady Latimer! The golden harvest was all gone from the fields, and there was a change of hue upon the woods—yellow and red and russet mingled with their deep green. The signs of decay in the vivid life of nature could not touch Bessie with melancholy yet—but Mr Fairfax, glancing hither and thither over the bare, sunless landscape, said: “The winter will soon be upon us, Elizabeth—you must make the best of the few bright days

that are remaining—very few and very swift they seem when they are gone."

Hartwell was as secluded amongst its evergreens and fir-trees now as at midsummer, but in the overcast day the house had a dull and unattractive aspect. The maiden-sisters sat in the gloomy drawing-room alone to receive their guests, but after the lapse of a few minutes Lady Latimer entered. She was dressed in rich black silk and lace, carefully dressed, but the three years that had passed since Bessie Fairfax last saw her had left their mark. Bessie, her heart swelling, her eyes shining with emotion, moved to meet her, but Lady Latimer only shook hands with sweet ceremoniousness, and she was instantly herself again. The likeness that had struck the maiden sisters did not strike my lady, or being warned of it, she was on her guard. There was a momentary silence, and then with cold pale face she turned to Mr Fairfax, congratulated him on having his granddaughter at home,

and asked how long she had been at Abbotsmead. Soon appeared Mr Oliver Smith, anxious to talk election gossip with his neighbour ; and for a few minutes Bessie had Lady Latimer to herself, to gaze at and admire, and confusedly to listen to, telling Beechhurst news.

“ Mr and Mrs Carnegie charged me with innumerable kind words for you—Jack wants you to go home before he goes to sea—Willy and Tom want you to make tails for their kites —Miss Buff will send you a letter soon—Mr Wiley trusts you have forgiven him his forgetfulness of your message.”

“ Oh no, I have not ! He lost me an opportunity that may come again I know not when,” said Bessie impetuously.

“ I must persuade your grandfather to lend you to me for a month next spring, when the leaves are coming out and the orchards are in blossom—or if he cannot spare you then, when the autumn tints begin.”

"Oh, thank you ! But I think the Forest lovely at all seasons—when the boughs are bare, or when they are covered with snow."

Bessie would have been glad that the invitation should come now, without waiting for next year, but that was not even thought of. Lady Latimer was looking towards the gentlemen, more interested in their interests than in the small Beechhurst chat that Bessie would never have tired of. After a few minutes of divided attention my lady rose, and *à propos* of the Normminster election, expressed her satisfaction in the career that seemed to be opening for Mr Cecil Burleigh.

"Lord Latimer thought highly of him from a boy. He was often at Umpleby in the holidays. He is like a son to my old friend at Brentwood ; Lady Angleby is happy in having a nephew who bids fair to attain distinction, since her own sons prefer obscurity. She deplores their want of ambition—it must be, indeed, a trial to a mother of her aspiring

temper"—so my lady talked on, heard, and not often interrupted ; it was the old voice and grand manner that Bessie Fairfax remembered so well, and once so vastly reverenced. She did not take much more notice of Bessie. After luncheon she chose to pace the lawn with her brother and Mr Fairfax, debating and predicting the course of public affairs which shared her thoughts with the government of Beechhurst. Bessie remained indoors with the two quiet sisters who were not disposed to forsake the fireside for the garden—the wood fire was really comfortable that clouded afternoon, though September was not yet far advanced. Miss Charlotte sat by one of the windows, holding back the curtain to watch the trio on the lawn, and Bessie sat near, able to observe them too.

" Dear Olympia is as energetic as ever—but, Juliana, don't you think she is contracting a slight stoop to one side ? " said Miss Charlotte. Miss Juliana approached to look out.

"She always did hang that arm. Dear Olympia ! Still she is a majestic figure. She was one of the handsomest women in Europe, Miss Fairfax, when Lord Latimer married her."

"I can well imagine that—she is beautiful now when she smiles and colours a little," said Bessie.

"Ah ! that smile of Olympia's ! We do not often see it in these days, but it had a magic ! All the men were in love with her—she made a great marriage. Lord Latimer was not one of our oldest nobility, but he was very rich, and his mansion at Umpleby was splendid—quite a palace—and our Olympia was queen there."

"We never married," said Miss Charlotte meekly. "It would not have done for us to marry men who could not have been received at court, so to speak—at Umpleby, I mean. Olympia said so at the time, and we agreed with her. Dear Olympia was the only one of

us who married—except Maggie, our half-sister, the eldest of our father's children, Mrs Bernard's mother—and that was long before the great event in our family."

Bessie fancied there was a flavour of regret in these statements. Miss Juliana took up the thread where her sister had dropped it—

"There is our dear Oliver—what a perfect gentleman he was! How accomplished, how elegant! If your sweet Aunt Dorothy had not died when she did, he might have been your near connection, Miss Fairfax. We have often urged him to marry, if only for the sake of the property, but he has steadfastly refused to give that good and lovely young creature a successor. Our elder brother also died unmarried."

Miss Charlotte chimed in again: "Lady Latimer moved for so many years in a distinguished circle that she can throw her mind into public business. We range with humble livers in content, and are limited to the politics of a very small school and hamlet. You will

be a near neighbour, Miss Fairfax, and we hope you will come often to Hartwell—we cannot be Lady Latimer to you, but we will do our best. Abbotsmead was once a familiar haunt—of late years it has been almost a house shut up."

Bessie liked the kindly, garrulous old ladies and promised to be neighbourly. "I have been told," she said after a short silence, "that my grandfather was devoted to Lady Latimer when they were young."

"Your grandfather, my dear, was one amongst many who were devoted to her," said Miss Juliana hastily.

"No more than that? Oh, I hoped he was preferred above others," said Bessie without much reflecting.

"Why hope it?" said Miss Charlotte in a saddened tone. "Dorothy thought that he was, and resented Olympia's marriage with Lord Latimer as a treachery to her brother that was past pardon. Oliver shared Dorothy's

sentiments—but we are all friends again now, thank God ! Juliana's opinion is that dear Olympia cared no more for Richard Fairfax than she cared for any of her other suitors—or why should she have married Lord Latimer ? Olympia was her own mistress, and pleased herself—no one else ; for we should have preferred Richard Fairfax, all of us. But she had her way, and there was a breach between Hartwell and Abbotsmead for many years in consequence—why do we talk of it ? it is past and gone ! And there they go, walking up and down the lawn together, as I have seen them walk a hundred times and a hundred to that ! How strangely the old things seem to come round again ! ”

At that moment the three turned towards the house. Lady Latimer was talking with great earnestness ; Mr Fairfax sauntered with his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes on the ground ; Mr Oliver Smith was not listening. When they entered the room her grand-

father said to Bessie : “ Come, Elizabeth, it is time we were riding home ; ” and when he saw her wistful eyes turn to the visitor from the Forest, he added : “ You have not lost Lady Latimer yet. She will come over to Abbotsmead the day after to-morrow.”

Bessie could not help being reminded by her grandfather’s face and voice of another old Beechhurst friend—Mr Phipps. Perhaps this luncheon at Hartwell had been pleasanter to her than to him—though even she had an after-taste of disappointment in it, because Lady Latimer no longer dazzled her judgment. To the end my lady preserved her animation, and when the visitors had mounted, and were ready to ride away, she still engaged Mr Fairfax’s ear while she expounded her views of the mischief that would accrue if ever election by ballot became the law of the land.

“ You must talk to Chiverton about that,” said the Squire, lifting his hat, and moving off.

"I shall drive over to Castlemount to-morrow," said my lady, and she accompanied her visitors to the gate with more last words on a variety of themes that had been previously discussed and dismissed.

All the way home the Squire never once opened his mouth to speak ; he appeared thoroughly jaded and depressed, and in his most sarcastic humour. At dinner Bessie heard more bitter sentiments against her sex than she had ever heard in her life before, and wondered whether they were the residuum of his disappointed passion.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MY LADY RE-VISITS OLD SCENES.

To meet Lady Latimer and Mr Oliver Smith at Abbotsmead, Lady Angleby and Mr Cecil Burleigh came over from Brentwood. Bessie Fairfax was sorry. She longed to have my lady to herself. She thought that she might then ask questions about other friends in the Forest—about friends at Brook—which she felt it impossible to ask in the presence of uninterested or adverse witnesses. But Lady Latimer wished for no confidential communications. She had received at Brentwood full particulars of the alliance that was projected between the families of Fairfax and Burleigh, and considered it highly desirable. My lady's principle was entirely against any wilfulness of affection in young girls. In this she was

always consistent, and Bessie's sentimental constancy to the idea of Harry Musgrave would have provoked her utter disapproval. It was, therefore, for Bessie's comfort that no opportunity was given her of betraying it.

At luncheon the grand ladies introduced their philanthropic hobbies, and were tedious to everybody but each other. They supposed the two young people would be grateful to be left to entertain themselves ; but Bessie was not grateful at all, and her grandfather sat through the meal looking terribly like Mr Phipps—meditating, perhaps, on the poor results in the way of happiness that had attended the private lives of his guests, who were yet so eager to meddle with their neighbours' lives. When luncheon was over, Lady Latimer quitting the dining-room first, walked through the hall to the door of the great drawing-room. The little page ran quickly, and opened to her, then ran in and drew back the silken curtains to admit the light. The im-

mense room was close yet chill as rooms are that have been long disused for daily purposes.

"Ah, you do not live here as you used to do formerly?" she said to Mr Fairfax who followed her.

"No, we are a diminished family. The octagon-parlour is our common sitting-room."

Bessie had promised Macky that some rainy day she would make a tour of the house, and view the pictures, but she had not done it yet, and this room was strange to her. The elder visitors had been once quite familiar with it. Lady Latimer pointed to a fine painting of the Virgin and Child, and remarked: "There is the Sasso-Ferrato," then sat down with her back to it, and began to talk of political difficulties in Italy. Mr Cecil Burleigh was interested in Italy; so was Mr Oliver Smith, and they had a very animated conversation in which the others joined—all but Bessie.

Bessie listened and looked on, and felt not quite happy—rather disenchanted, in fact. Lady Latimer was the same as ever—she overflowed with practical goodness, but Bessie did not regard her with the same simple adoring confidence. Was it the influence of the old love-story that she had heard? My lady seemed entirely free from pathetic or tender memories, and domineered in the conversation here as she did everywhere. Even Lady Angleby was half effaced, and the Squire had nothing to say.

“I like her best at Fairfield,” Bessie thought—but Bessie liked everything best in the Forest.

Just before taking her leave my lady said abruptly to the young lady of the house: “An important sphere is open to you—I hope you will be able to fill it with honour to yourself and benefit to others. You have an admirable example of self-devotion, if you can imitate it, in Mrs Chiverton of Castlemount. She told

me that you were schoolfellows and friends already. I was glad to hear it."

These remarks were so distinctly enunciated that every eye was at once attracted to Bessie's face. She coloured, and with an odd, fastidious twist of her mouth—the feminine rendering of the Squire's cynical smile—she answered : "Mrs Chiverton has what she married for—God grant her satisfaction in it, and save me from her temptation !" In nothing did Bessie Fairfax's early breeding more show itself than in her audacious simplicity of speech when she was strongly moved. Lady Latimer did not condescend to make any rejoinder, but she remarked to Mr Fairfax afterwards that habits of mind were as permanent as other habits, and she hoped that Elizabeth would not give him trouble by her stiff self-opinion. Mr Fairfax hoped not also—but in the present instance he had silently applauded it. And Mr Burleigh was charmed that she had the wit to answer so skilfully.

When my lady was gone Bessie grieved and vexed herself with compunctionous thoughts—but that was not my lady's last visit ; she came over with Miss Charlotte another afternoon when Mr Fairfax was gone to Normminster, and on this occasion she behaved with the gracious sweetness that had fascinated her young admirer in former days. Bessie said she was like herself again ! At my lady's request Bessie took her up to the white parlour. On the threshold she stopped a full minute, gazing in—nothing of its general aspect was changed since she saw it last—how long ago ! She went straight to the old book-case, and took down one of Dorothy Fairfax's manuscript volumes, and furled over the leaves. Miss Charlotte drew Bessie to the window, and engaged her in admiration of the prospect to leave her sister undisturbed.

Presently my lady said : “ Charlotte, do you remember these old books of Dorothy's ? ” and Miss Charlotte went, and looked over the page.

"Oh yes! dear Dorothy had such a pretty taste—she always knew when a sentiment was nicely put. She was a great lover of the old writers"—

After a few minutes of silent reading my lady spoke again. "She once recited to me some verses of George Herbert's—of when God at first made man, how He gave him strength, beauty, wisdom, honour, pleasure, all to keep, but with repining restlessness. They were a prophecy! I cannot find them." She restored the volume to its shelf, quoting the last lines—all she remembered distinctly—

"Let him be rich and weary, that at last,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to my breast."

"I know—they are in the last volume, towards the end," said Bessie Fairfax, and quickly found them. "They do not say that God gave man *love*—and that is a craving too. Don't you think so?"

Lady Latimer looked straight before her out of the window with lips compressed.

"What do you mean by love, my dear? so many foolish feelings go by that name?" said Miss Charlotte filling the pause.

"Oh, I mean just *love*—the warm, happy feeling in my heart towards everybody who belongs to me, or is good to me—to my father and mother, and all of them at home, and to my grandfather now, and my Uncle Laurence, and more besides"—

"You are an affectionate soul!" said my lady contemplating her quietly. "You were born loving and tender"—

"Like dear Dorothy," added Miss Charlotte with a sigh. "It is a great treasure, a warm heart"—

"Some of us have hearts of stone given us—more our misfortune than our fault," said Lady Latimer with a sudden air of offence, and turned, and left the room, preceding the others downstairs. Bessie was startled—Miss Charlotte made no sign, but when they were in the hall, she asked her sister if she would

not like to see the gardens once more. Indeed she would, she said ; and addressing Bessie with equanimity restored, she reminded her how she had once told her that Abbotsmead was very beautiful, and its gardens always sunny, and she hoped that Bessie was not disappointed, but found them answer to her description. Bessie said, “yes,” of course ; and my lady led the way again—led the way everywhere, and to and fro so long that Miss Charlotte was fain to rest at intervals, and even Bessie’s young feet began to ache with following her. My lady recollected every turn in the old walks, and noted every alteration that had been made—noted the growth of certain trees, and here and there where one had disappeared. “The gum-cistus is gone—that lovely gum-cistus ! In the hot summer evenings how sweet it was ! like Indian spices. And my cedar—the cedar I planted—is gone ; it might have been a great tree now—it must have been cut down.”

"No, Olympia, it never grew up—it withered away; Richard Fairfax told Oliver that it died," said Miss Charlotte.

The ladies from Hartwell were still in the gardens when the Squire came home from Normminster, and on Jonquil's information he joined them there. "Ah! Olympia, are you here!" he said.

My lady coloured, and looked as shy as a girl. "Yes—we were just going. I am glad to have seen you to say good-bye."

They did not, however, say good-bye yet; they took a turn together amongst the old familiar places, Miss Charlotte and Bessie resting meanwhile in the great porch, and philosophising on what they saw.

"Did you know grandpapa's wife—my grandmamma?" Bessie began by asking.

"Oh yes, my dear! She was a sprightly girl before she married, but all her life after she went softly. Mr Fairfax was not an unkind or negligent husband, but there was something

wanting. She was as unlike Olympia as possible—very plain and simple in her tastes and appearance. She kept much at home, and never sought to shine in society—for which, indeed, she was not fitted—but she was a good woman, and fond of her children.”

“And grandpapa was perfectly indifferent to her—it must have been dreary work. Oh, what a pity that Lady Latimer did not care for him !”

“She did care for him very much”—

“But if she cared for Umpleby more ?”

Miss Charlotte sighed retrospectively, and said : “Olympia was ambitious—she is the same still—I see no change. She longed to live in the world’s eye, and to have her fill of homage ; for nature had gifted her with the graces and talents that adorn high station—but she was never a happy woman, never satisfied, or at peace with herself. She ardently desired children, and none were given her—I have often thought that she threw away sub-

stance for shadow—the true and lasting joys of life for its vain glories. But she had what she chose, and if it disappointed her she never confessed to her mistake or avowed a single regret. Her pride was enough to sustain her through all."

"It is of no use regretting mistakes that must last a life-time. But one is sorry!"

The Squire and Lady Latimer were drawing slowly towards the porch, talking calmly as they walked.

"Yes, one is sorry. Those two were well suited to each other once," said Miss Charlotte.

The Hartwell carriage came round the sweep, the Hartwell coachman—who was groom and gardener too—not in the best of humours at having been kept so long waiting. Lady Latimer, with a sweet countenance, kissed Bessie at her leave-taking, and told her that permission was obtained for her to visit Fairfield next spring. Then she got into the carriage, and bowing and smiling in her ex-

quisite way, and Miss Charlotte a little impatient and tired, they drove off. Bessie, exhilarated with her rather remote prospect of the Forest, turned to speak to her grandfather. But, lo, his brief amenity had vanished, and he was Mr Phipps again !

## CHAPTER XV.

### A SUCCESS AND A REPULSE.

THE weather at the beginning of October was not favourable. There were gloomy days of wind and rain that Bessie Fairfax had to fill as she could, and in her own company, of which she found it possible to have more than enough. Mr Fairfax had acquired solitary tastes and habits, and though to see Elizabeth's face at meal-times and to ride with her was a pleasure, he was seldom at her command at other hours. Mrs Stokes was sociable, and Mrs Forbes was kind, but friends out of doors do not compensate altogether for the want of company within. Sir Edward Lucas rode or drove over rather frequently—seeking advice—but he had to take it from the Squire after the first or second occasion, though his contemporary

would have given it with pleasure. Bessie resigned herself to circumstances, and, like a well-brought-up young lady, improved her leisure—practised her songs, sketched the ruins and the mill, and learnt by heart some of the best pieces in her Aunt Dorothy's collection of poetry.

Towards the middle of the month Mr Cecil Burleigh came again, bringing his sister with him to stay to the end of it. Bessie was very glad of her society, and when her feminine acumen had discerned Miss Burleigh's relations with the vicar, she did not grudge the large share of it that was given to his mother—she reflected that it was a pity these elderly lovers should lose time. What did they wait for—Mr Forbes and his gentle Mary ? Mr Cecil Burleigh and his sweet Julia ?—She would have liked to arrange their affairs speedily.

Mr Cecil Burleigh went to and fro between Normminster and Abbotsmead as his business required ; and if opportunity and propinquity

could have advanced his suit, he had certainly no lack of either. But he felt that he was not prospering with Miss Fairfax ; she was most animated, amiable and friendly, but she was not in a propitious mood to be courted. Bessie was to go to Brentwood for the nomination day, and to remain until the election was over. By this date it had begun to dawn on other perceptions besides Mr Cecil Burleigh's that she was not a young lady in love. His sister struggled against this conviction as long as she was able, and when it prevailed over her hopefulness, she ventured to speak of it to him. He was not unprepared.

"I am, after all, afraid, Cecil, that Miss Fairfax may turn out an uninteresting person," she began diffidently.

"Because I fail to interest her, Mary—is that it ?" said her brother.

"She perplexes me by her cool, capricious behaviour. *Now* I think her very dear and sweet, and that she appreciates you ; then she

looks or says something mocking, and I don't know what to think. Does she care for any one else, I should like to know ? ”

“ Perhaps she made some such discovery at Ryde for me.”

“ She told me of your meeting with the Gardiners there. Poor Julia ! I wish it could be Julia, Cecil !”

“ I doubt whether it will ever be Miss Fairfax, Mary. She is the oddest mixture of wit and simplicity.”

“ Perhaps she has some old prepossession ? She would not be persuaded against her will.”

“ All her prepossessions are in favour of her friends in the Forest. There was a young fellow for whom she had a childish fondness —he was at Bayeux when I called upon her there.”

“ Harry Musgrave ?—Oh, they are like brother and sister—she told me so.”

"She is a good girl, and believes it, perhaps ; but it is a brother and sisterhood likely to lapse into warmer relations, given the opportunity. That is what Mr Fairfax is intent on hindering. My hope was in her youth—but she is not to be won by the semblance of wooing. She is either calmly unconscious or consciously discouraging."

"How will Mr Fairfax bear his disappointment ?"

"The recent disclosure of his son Laurence's marriage will lessen that. It is no longer of the same importance who Miss Fairfax marries. She has a great deal of character, and may take her own way. She is all anxiety now to heal the division between the father and son; that she may have the little boys over at Abbotsmead, and she will succeed before long. The disclosure was made just in time, supposing it likely to affect my intentions ; but Miss Fairfax is still an excellent

match for me—for me, or any gentleman of my standing."

"I fancy Sir Edward Lucas is of that opinion."

"Yes, Sir Edward is quite captivated, but he will easily console himself. The Squire has intimated to him that he has other views for her—the young man is cool to me in consequence."

Miss Burleigh became reflective. "Miss Fairfax's position is changed, Cecil. A good connexion and a good dower are one thing, and an heiress presumptive to Kirkham is another. Perhaps you would as lief remain a bachelor?"

"If Miss Fairfax prove impregnable—yes."

"You will test her, then?"

"Surely. It is in the bond. I have had her help, and will pay her the compliment."

Miss Burleigh regarded her brother with almost as much perplexity as she regarded Miss Fairfax. The thought passed through her mind that he did not wish even her to

suspect how much his feelings were engaged in the pursuit of that uncertain young lady because he anticipated a refusal ; but what she thought she kept to herself, and less interested persons did not observe that there was any relaxation in the aspirant member's assiduities to Miss Fairfax. Bessie accepted them with quiet simplicity. She knew that her grandfather was bearing the main cost of Mr Cecil Burleigh's canvass, and she might interpret his kindnesses as gratitude—it cannot be averred that she did so interpret them, for she gave nobody her confidence, but the plea was open to her.

Lady Angleby welcomed Miss Fairfax on her second visit to Brentwood as if she were already a daughter of the house. It had not entered into her mind to imagine that her magnificent nephew could experience the slight of a rejection by this unsophisticated, lively, little girl. She had quite reconciled herself to the change in Bessie's prospects, and looked

forward to the marriage with satisfaction undiminished ; Mr Fairfax had much in his power with reference to settlements, and the conduct of his son Laurence would be an incitement to use it to the utmost extent. His granddaughter in any circumstances would be splendidly dowered. Nothing could be prettier than Bessie's behaviour during this critical short interval before the election, and strangers were enchanted with her. A few more persons who knew her better were falling into a state of doubt—her grandfather amongst them—but nothing was said to her ; for it was best the state of doubt should continue, and not be converted into a state of certainty until the crisis was over.

It was soon over now, and resulted in the return of Mr Cecil Burleigh as the representative of Normminster in the Conservative interest, and the ignominious defeat of Mr Bradley. Once more the blue party held up its head in the ancient city, and Mr Fairfax, Mr Chiverton

and others, their Tory contemporaries, were at ease again for the safety of the country. Mr Burleigh the elder had come from Carisfort for the election, and he now for the first time saw the young lady of whom he had heard so much. He was a very handsome, but very rustic poor squire, who troubled the society of cities little. Bessie's beauty was perfect to his taste, especially when her blushes were revived by a certain tender paternal significance and familiarity in his address to her. But when the blushes cooled, her spirit of mischief grew vivacious to repel their false confession, and even Lady Angleby felt for a moment disturbed. Only for a moment, however. She wished that Mr Burleigh would leave his country manners at home, and ascribing Bessie's shy irritation to alarmed modesty, introduced a pleasant subject to divert her thoughts.

"Is there to be a ball at Brentwood or no ball, Miss Fairfax?" said she with amiable suggestion. "I think there was something

mooted about a ball, if my nephew won his election, was there not?"

What could Bessie do but feel appeased, and brighten charmingly? "Oh, we shall dance for joy if you give us one—but if you don't think we deserve it"—said she.

"Oh, as for your déserts!—Well, Mary, we must have the dance for joy—Cecil wishes it, and so, I suppose, do you all," said her ladyship with comprehensive affability. Mr Burleigh nodded at Bessie, as much as to say that nothing could be refused her.

Bessie blushed again. She loved a little pleasure—and a ball—a real ball—O paradise! And Mr Cecil Burleigh coming in at the moment she forgot her proper reticent demeanour, and made hâste to announce to him the delight that was in prospect. He quite entered into her humour, and availed himself of the moment to bespeak her as his partner to open the ball.

It was settled that she should stay at

Brentwood to help in the preparations for it, and her grandfather left her there extremely contented. Cards of invitation were sent out indiscriminately to blue and orange people of quality ; carpenters and decorators came on the scene, and were busy for a week in a large, empty room, converting it, and making it beautiful. The officers of the cavalry regiment stationed at Normminster were asked, and offered the services of their band. Miss Jocund and her rivals were busy, morning, noon, and night, in the construction of aerial dresses, and all the young ladies who were bidden to the dance fell into great enthusiasm, when it was currently reported that the new member, who was so handsome and so wonderfully clever, was almost, if not quite, engaged to be married to that pretty, nice Miss Fairfax, with whom they were all beginning to be more or less acquainted.

Mr Fairfax did not return to Brentwood until the day of the dance. Lady Angleby was

anxious that it should be the occasion of bringing her nephew's courtship to a climax, and she gave reasons for the expediency of having the whole affair carried through to a conclusion without unnecessary delays. Sir Edward Lucas had been intrusive this last week, and Miss Fairfax too good-natured in listening to his tedious talk of colliers, cottages and spade husbandry. Her ladyship scented a danger. There was an evident suitability of age and temper between these two young persons, and she had fancied that Bessie looked pleased when Sir Edward's honest brown face appeared in her drawing-room. She had been obliged to ask him to her ball, but she would have been thankful to leave him out.

Mr Fairfax heard all his old friend had to urge, and though he made light of Sir Edward, it was with a startling candour that he added : "But woman's a riddle, indeed, if Elizabeth would give her shoe-tie for Cecil." Lady Angleby was so amazed and shocked that she

made no answer whatever. The Squire went on : "The farce had better pause—or end. Elizabeth is sensitive and shrewd enough. Cecil has no heart to give her, and she will never give her's unless in fair exchange. I have observed her all along, and that is the conclusion I have come to. She saw Miss Julia Gardiner at Ryde, and fathomed that old story—she supposes them to be engaged, and is of much too loyal a disposition to dream of love for another woman's lover. That is the explanation of her friendliness towards Cecil."

"But Julia Gardiner is as good as married !" cried Lady Angleby. "Cecil will be cruelly disappointed if you forbid him to speak to Miss Fairfax. Pray, say nothing, at least, until to-night is over !"

"I shall not interfere at the present point. Let him use his own discretion, and incur a rebuff, if he please. But his visits to Abbotsmead are pleasant, and I would prefer not to

have either Elizabeth annoyed or his visits given up."

"You have used him so generously that whatever you wish must have his first consideration ;" said Lady Angleby. She was extremely surprised by the indulgent tone Mr Fairfax assumed towards his granddaughter —she would rather have seen him apply a stern authority to the management of that self-willed young lady ; for there was no denial that he, quite as sincerely as herself, desired the alliance between their families.

Mr Fairfax had not chosen a very opportune moment to trouble her ladyship's mind with his own doubts. She was always nervous on the eve of an entertainment at Brentwood, and this fresh anxiety agitated her to such a degree that Miss Burleigh suffered a martyrdom before her duty of superintendence over the preparations in ball-room and supper-room were accomplished. Her aunt found time to tell her Mr Fairfax's opinions respecting his grand-

daughter, and she again found time to communicate them to her brother. To her prodigious relief he was not moved thereby. He had a letter from Ryde in his pocket, apprising him on what day his dear Julia was to become Mrs Brotherton ; and he was in an elastic humour because of his late success—just in the humour when a man of mature age and sense puts his trust in fortune, and expects to go on succeeding. Perhaps he had not consciously endeavoured to detach his thoughts from Julia, but a shade of retrospective reverie had fallen upon her image, and if she was lost to him, Elizabeth Fairfax was, of all other women he had known, the one he would prefer to take her place. He was quite sure of this—though he was not in love. The passive resistance that he had encountered from Miss Fairfax had not whetted his ardour much, but there was the natural spirit of man in him that hates defeat in any shape ; and from his air and manner, his sister deduced

that, in the midst of uncertainties shared by his best friends, he still kept hold of hope. Whether he might put his fate to the touch that night, would, he said, depend on opportunity—and impulse.

Such was the attitude of parties on the famous occasion of Lady Angleby's ball to celebrate her nephew's successful election. Miss Fairfax had been a great help to Miss Burleigh in arranging the fruit and the flowers, and if Mrs Betts had not been peremptory in making her rest awhile before dinner, she would have been as tired to begin with as a light heart of eighteen can be. The waiting-woman had received a commission of importance from Lady Angleby (nothing less than to find out how much or how little Miss Fairfax knew of Miss Julia Gardiner's past and present circumstances), and accident favoured her execution of it. A cheerful fire blazed on the hearth in Bessie's room; by the hearth was drawn up the couch, and a newspaper lay

on the couch. Naturally Bessie's first act was to take it up, and when she saw that it was a *Hampton Chronicle*, she exclaimed with pleasure, and asked did Mrs Betts receive it regularly from her friends ? if so she should like to read it, for the sake of knowing what went on in the Forest.

" No, Miss, it only comes a time by chance—that came by this afternoon's post. I have barely glanced through it—I expect it was sent by my cousin to let me know the fine wedding that is on the *tapis* at Ryde—Mr Brotherton, her master, and Miss Julia Gardiner."

" Miss Julia Gardiner ! " exclaimed Bessie in a low, astonished voice.

Mrs Betts, with an indifference that a more cunning young lady than her's would have felt to be carefully prepared, proceeded with her information. " Yes, Miss ; you met the lady, I think ? The gentleman is many years older, but a worthy gentleman. And she is a most

sweet lady, which, where there is children to begin with, is much to be considered. She has no fortune, but there is oceans of money on his side—oceans."

Bessie did not jump to the conclusion that it was, therefore, a mercenary marriage, as she had done in another case. She forgot, for the moment, her interest in the Forest news ; and though she seemed to be contemplating her beautiful dress for the evening laid out upon the bed, the pensive abstraction of her gaze implied profounder thoughts. Mrs Betts busied herself with various little matters—sewed on faster the rosette of a white shoe, and the buttons on the gloves that were to be worn with that foam of silvery tulle. What Bessie was musing of she could not herself have told—a confused sensation of pain and pity was uppermost at first. Mrs Betts stood at a distance, and with her back to her young mistress, but she commanded her face in the glass, and saw it overspread slowly by a warm soft

blush, and the next moment she was asked : “Do you think she will be happy, Mrs Betts ? ”

“ We may trust so, Miss,” said the waiting-woman, still feigning to be fully occupied with her duties to her young lady’s pretty things. “ Why should she not ? She is old enough to know her mind, and will have everything that heart can desire—won’t she ? ”

Bessie did not attempt any answer to this suggestive query. She put the newspaper aside, and stretched herself with a sigh along the couch, folding her hands under her cheek on the pillow. Her eyes grew full of tears, and so she lay, meditating on this new lesson in life until Mrs Betts warned her that it was time to dress for dinner. Miss Fairfax had by this date so far accustomed herself to the usages of young ladies of rank, that Mrs Betts was permitted to assist at her toilette. It was a silent process this evening, and the penetration of the waiting-woman was at fault

when she took furtive glances in the mirror at the subdued face that never smiled once, not even at its own beauty. She gave Lady Angleby an exact account of what had passed, and added for interpretation : “ Miss Fairfax was surprised, and sorry, I’m sure. I should say she believed Miss Julia Gardiner to be attached to somebody else. The only question she asked was, did I think she would be happy.” Lady Angleby could extract nothing out of this.

Every one was aware of a change in Bessie when she went into the drawing-room—she felt as one feels who has heard bad news, and must conceal the impression of it. But the visible effect was that her original shyness seemed to have returned with more than her original pride, and she blushed vividly when Mr Cecil Burleigh made her a low bow of compliment on her beautiful appearance. Mr Fairfax had enriched his granddaughter that day with a suite of fine pearls, once his sister Dorothy’s,

and Bessie had not been able to deny herself the ornament of them, shining on her neck and arms. Her dress was white and bright as sea-foam in sunshine, but her own inimitable blooming freshness made her dress to be scarcely at all regarded. Every day at this period added something to her loveliness—the loveliness of youth, health, grace, and a good nature.

When dinner was over the three young people adjourned to the ball-room, leaving Lady Angleby and Mr Fairfax together. Miss Burleigh and Bessie began by walking up and down arm-in-arm, then they took a few turns in a waltz, and after that Miss Burleigh said : “ Cecil, Miss Fairfax and you are a perfect height to waltz together—try the floor, and I will go and play with the music-room door open. You will hear very well.” She went off quickly, the moment she had spoken, and Bessie could not refuse to try the floor ; but she had a downcast, conscious air under her

impromptu partner's observation. Mr Cecil Burleigh was in a gay, light mood, as became him on this public occasion of his election triumph, and he was further elated by Miss Fairfax's amiable condescension in waltzing with him at his sister's behest; and as it was certainly a pleasure to any girl who loved waltzing to waltz with him, they went on until the music stopped at the sound of carriage wheels.

"You are fond of dancing, Miss Fairfax?" said her cavalier.

"Oh yes!" said Bessie with a pretty upward glance. She had enjoyed that waltz extremely; her natural animation was reviving, too buoyant to lie long under the depression of melancholy, philosophic reverie.

The guests were received in the drawing-room, and began to arrive in uninterrupted succession. Mr and Mrs Tindal, Lord and Lady Eden, Mr and Mrs Philip Raymond, Mr Maurice and Miss Lois Wynyard, Mrs Lefevre

and Miss Jean Lefevre, Mr and Mrs Chiverton, Colonel Stokes and his wife, and Sir Edward Lucas, with an architectural scheme in his pocket—however, he danced none the worse for it, as Miss Fairfax testified by dancing with him three times. She had a charming audacity in evading awkward partners, and it was observed that she waltzed only with the new member. She looked in joyous spirits, and acknowledged no reason why she should deny herself a pleasure. More than once in the course of the evening, she flattered Lady Angleby's hopes by telling her it was a most delicious ball!

Mr Fairfax contemplated his granddaughter with serene speculation. Lady Angleby had communicated to him the results of Mrs Betts' inquisition. At a disengaged moment he noticed a wondering pathos in Bessie's eyes, which were following Mr Cecil Burleigh's agile movements through the intricate mazes of the Lancers' Quadrilles. His prolonged gaze

ended by attracting her's ; she blushed, and drew a long breath, and seemed to shake off some persistent thought—then she came and asked, like a light-footed, mocking, merry girl, if he was not longing to dance too, and would he not dance with her ? He dismissed her to pay a little attention to Mrs Chiverton, who sat like a fine statue against the wall, unsought of partners, and Bessie went with cheerful submission. Her former school-rival was kind to her now with a patronising, married superiority that she did not dislike. Mrs Chiverton knew from her husband of the family project for Miss Fairfax's settlement in life, and as she approved of Mr Cecil Burleigh as highly as her allegiance to Mr Chiverton permitted her to approve of anybody but himself, she spoke at some length in his praise, desiring to be agreeable. Bessie suffered her to go on without check or discouragement—she must have understood the drift of many things this

evening which had puzzled her hitherto, but she made no sign. Miss Burleigh said to her brother when they parted for the night that she really did not know what to think or what to advise—further than that Sir Edward Lucas ought to be “set down,” or there was no guessing how far he might be tempted to encroach. Miss Fairfax, she considered, was too universally inclined to please.

Mr Cecil Burleigh had no clear resolve of what he would do when he went to walk in the garden the next morning. He knew what he wanted. A sort of paradoxical exhilaration possessed him. He remembered his dear Julia with tender, weary regret, and gave his fancy licence to dwell on the winsomeness of Bessie. And while it was so dwelling he heard her tuneful tongue as she came with Miss Burleigh over the grass—still white with hoar-frost where the sun had not fallen. He advanced to meet them.

"O Cecil! here you are! Mr Fairfax has been inquiring for you, but there is no hurry," said his sister, and she was gone.

Bessie wore a broad shady hat, yet not shady enough to conceal the impetuous blushes that mantled her cheeks on her companion's evasion. She felt what it was the prelude to. Mr Cecil Burleigh, inspired with the needful courage by these fallacious signs, broke into a stammering eloquence of passion that was yet too plain to be misunderstood—not reflecting, he, that maiden blushes may have more sources than one. The hot torrent of Bessie's rose from the fountain of indignation in her heart—indignation at his inconstancy to the sweet lady who she knew loved him, and his impertinence in daring to address herself when she knew he loved that lady. She silently confessed that to this upshot his poor pretences of wooing had tended from the first, and that she had been wilfully half-blind and wholly unbelieving—so unwilling are proud young

creatures to imagine that their best feelings can be traded on—but she was none the less wrathful and scornful as she lifted her eyes, dilated with tears, to his, and sweeping him a curtsey, turned away without a single word—without a single word, yet never was wooer more emphatically answered !

They parted and went different ways ; Bessie —thinking she would give all she was worth that he had held his peace, and let her keep her dream of pity and sympathy—took the shrubbery path to the village and Miss Hague's cottage-lodgings ; and Mr Cecil Burleigh,—repenting too late the vain presumption that had reckoned on her youth and ignorance, apart from the divining power of an honest soul,—walked off to Normminster to rid himself of his heavy sense of mortification and discomfiture.

Miss Burleigh saw her brother go down the road, and knew what had happened ; and such a pang came with the certainty that only then

did she realise how great had been her former confidence. She stood a long while at her window, listening and watching for Miss Fairfax's return to the house, but Bessie was resting in Miss Hague's parlour, hearing anecdotes of her father and uncles when they were little boys, and growing by degrees composed after her disturbing emotion. She wished to keep the morning's adventure to herself, or if the story must be told, to leave the telling of it to Mr Cecil Burleigh—and when she went back to the house, the old governess accompanying her, she betrayed no counsel by her face—that was rosy with the winter cold, and hardly waxed rosier when Lady Angleby expressed a wish to know what she had done with her nephew, missing since breakfast. Bessie very simply said that she had only seen him for a minute, and she believed that he had gone into the town—she had been paying a long promised visit to Miss Hague.

Mr Cecil Burleigh reappeared midway the

afternoon, was summoned to his aunt's closet, and bidden to explain himself. The explanation was far from easy. Lady Angleby was profoundly irritated, and reproached her nephew with his blundering folly in visiting Miss Julia Gardiner in Miss Fairfax's company. She refused to believe but that his fascination must have proved irresistible if Miss Fairfax had not been led to the discovery of that faded romance—was he quite sure that the young lady's answer was conclusive? Perfectly conclusive—so conclusive that he should not venture to address her again. “Not after Julia's marriage?” his sister whispered. Lady Angleby urged a temporary retreat, and then a new approach—it was impossible but that a fine, spirited girl like Miss Fairfax must have ambition, and some appreciation of a distinguished mind—and how was her dear Cecil to support his position without the fortune she was to bring him? At this point Mr Cecil Burleigh manifested a contemptuous and angry

impatience against himself, and rose, and left the discussion to his grieved and disappointed female relatives. Mr Fairfax, on being informed of the repulse he had provoked, received the news calmly, and observed that it was no more than he had anticipated.

Towards evening Bessie felt her fortitude failing her, and did not appear at dinner nor in the drawing-room. Her excuses were understood and accepted, and in the morning early Mr Cecil Burleigh conveyed himself away by train to London, that his absence might release her from seclusion. Before he went, in a consultation with his aunt and Mr Fairfax, it was agreed that the late episode in his courtship should be kept quiet, and not treated as final. Later in the day Mr Fairfax carried his granddaughter home to Abbotsmead—not unconsoled by the reflection that he was not to be called upon to resign her to make bright somebody else's hearth. Bessie was much subdued. She had passed a bad night, she had shed many

tears, and though she had not encountered one reproach, she was under the distressing consciousness that she had vexed several people who had been good to her. At the same time there could not be two opinions of the wicked duplicity of a gentleman who could profess to love and wish to marry her, when his heart was devoted to another lady—she believed that she never could forgive him that insult !

Yet she was sorry even to tears again when she remembered him in the dull little drawing-room at Ryde, and Miss Julia Gardiner telling him that she had forgotten her old songs which he liked better than her new ones ; for it had dawned upon her that this scene—it had struck her then as sad—must have been their farewell—the *finis* to the love-chapter of their youth. Bessie averted her mind from the idea that Miss Julia Gardiner had consented to marry a rich, middle-aged gentleman who was a widower—she did not like it, it was utterly repugnant, she hated to think of it ! Oh, that

people would marry the right people, and not care so much for rank and money! Lady Angleby's loveliest sister had forty years ago aggrieved her whole family by marrying the poor Squire of Carisfort—and Lady Angleby had said in Bessie's hearing that her sister was the most enviable woman she knew, happy as the day was long, though so positively indigent as to be thankful for her eldest daughter's half-worn Brentwood finery to smarten up her younger girls. It must, indeed, be a cruel mistake to marry the wrong person! So far the wisdom and sentiment of Bessie Fairfax—all derived from observation or most trustworthy report—and, therefore, not to be laughed at, although she was so young.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A HARD STRUGGLE.

MR CECIL BURLEIGH's departure to town so immediately after Lady Angleby's ball might have given rise to remark had he not returned to Brentwood before the month's end, and in excellent spirits. During his brief absence he had, however, found time to run down to the Isle of Wight, and see Miss Julia Gardiner. In all trouble and vexation his thoughts still turned to her for rest.

Twice already a day had been named for the marriage, and twice it had been deferred to please her. It now stood fixed for February : "A good time to start for Rome, and the Easter festivals," she had pleaded. Mr Brotherton was kindness itself in consideration for her wishes, but her own family felt that

poor Julia was making a long agony of what, if it were to be done at all, were best done quickly. When Mr Cecil Burleigh went to Ryde he expected to find the preparations for the wedding very forward, but nothing seemed to have been begun. The young ladies were out walking ; but Mrs Gardiner, who had written him word that the 10th of December was the day, now told him almost in the first breath that it was put off again until the New Year.

“We shall all be thankful to have it over—I never knew dear Julia so capricious, or so little thoughtful for others,” said the poor, languid, weary lady.

Mr Cecil Burleigh heard the complaint with a miserable compassion, and when Julia came in, and her beautiful countenance broke into sunshine at the sight of him, he knew what a cruel anticipation for her this marriage really was. He could have wished for her sake—and a little for his own too, that the last three months were blotted from their history ; but

when they came to talk together, Julia with the quick discernment of a loving woman, felt that the youthful charms of Miss Fairfax had warmly engaged his imagination, though he had so much tenderness of heart still left for herself.

He did not stay long, and when he was going, he said that it would have been wiser never to have come—it was a selfish impulse brought him—he wanted to see her. Julia laughed at his simple confession; her sister Helen was rather angry.

“Now, I suppose you will be all unsettled again, Julia,” said she, though Julia had just then a most peaceful face. Helen was observant of her: “I know what you are dreaming—while there is the shadow of a chance that Cecil will return to you, Mr Brotherton will be left hanging between earth and heaven.”

“O Nellie! I wish you would marry Mr Brotherton yourself! Your appreciation of his merits is far higher than mine!”

"If I were in your place I would not use him as you do—it *is* a shame, Julia."

"It is not you who are sentenced to be buried alive, Nellie! I dare not look forward—I dread it more and more"—

"Of course. That is the effect of Cecil's ill-judged visit, and Mary Burleigh's foolish letter.—Pray, don't say so to mamma; it would be enough to lay her up for a week."

Julia shut her eyes, and sighed greatly. "Fashionable marriages are advertised with the tag of 'no cards'—you will have to announce mine as 'under chloroform.' Nellie, I never can go through with it!" was her cry.

"O Julia!" remonstrated her sister, "don't say that. If you throw over Mr Brotherton, half our friends will turn their backs upon us. We have been wretchedly poor, but we have always been well thought of."

Miss Julia Gardiner's brief joy passed in a thunder-shower of passionate tears.

It was not intended that the rebuff Mr Cecil Burleigh had received from Miss Fairfax should be generally known even by his friends, but it transpired, nevertheless, and was whispered as a secret in various Normminster circles. Buller heard it, but was incredulous when he saw the new member in his usual spirits ; Mrs Stokes guessed it, and was astonished ; Lady Angleby wrote about it to Lady Latimer with a petition for advice—though why Lady Latimer should be regarded as specially qualified to advise in affairs of the heart was a mystery. She was not backward, however, in responding to the request—let Mr Cecil Burleigh hold himself in reserve until Miss Julia Gardiner's marriage was an accomplished fact, and then let him come forward again. Miss Fairfax had behaved naturally under the circumstances, and Lady Latimer could not blame her. When the young lady came to Fairfield in the spring, according to her grandfather's pledge, Mr Cecil Burleigh should have the opportunity of meet-

ing her there ; but, meanwhile, he ought not entirely to give up calling at Abbotsmead. This, Mr Cecil Burleigh could not do without affronting his generous old friend—to whom Bessie gave no confidence, none being sought ; but he timed his first visit during her temporary absence, and she heard of it as ordinary news on her return.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A VISIT TO CASTLEMOUNT.

BESSIE FAIRFAX had been but a few days at home after the Brentwood rejoicings when there came for her an invitation from Mrs Chiverton to spend a week at Castlemount. She was perfectly ready to go—more ready to go than her grandfather was to part with her. She read him the letter at breakfast; he said he would think about it, and at luncheon he had not yet made up his mind. Before post-time, however, he supposed he must let her choose her own associates; and if she chose Mrs Chiverton for old acquaintance' sake, he would not refuse his consent—but Mr Chiverton and he were not on intimate terms.

Bessie went to Castlemount under escort of Mrs Betts. Mrs Chiverton was rejoiced to wel-

come her. "I like Miss Fairfax because she is honest. Her manner is a little brusque, but she has a good heart, and we knew each other at school," was her reason for desiring Bessie's company, given to Mr Chiverton. They got on together capitally. Mrs Chiverton had found her course and object in life already, and was as deeply committed to philanthropic labours and letters as either Lady Latimer or Lady Angleby. They were both numbered amongst her correspondents, and she promised to outvie them in originality and fertility of resource. What she chiefly wanted at Castlemount was a good listener, and Bessie Fairfax, as yet unprovided with a vocation, showed a fine turn that way. She reposed lazily at the end of Mrs Chiverton's encumbered writing-table, between the fire and the window, and heard her discourse with infinite patience. Bessie was too moderate ever to join the sisterhood of active reformers, but she had no objection to their activity while herself safe

from assaults. But when she was invited to sign papers, pledging herself to divers serious convictions, she demurred. Mrs Chiverton said she would not urge her. Bessie gracefully acquiesced, and Mrs Chiverton put in a more enticing plea.

“I can scarcely expect to interest you in my occupations all at once, but they bring often the most gratifying returns. Read that letter.”

Bessie read that letter. “Very honied phrases,” said she with her odd twist of the mouth, so like her grandfather. It was from a more practised philanthropist than the young lady to whom it was addressed, and was in a strain of fulsome adulation, redolent of gratitude for favours to come. Religious and benevolent egotism is impervious to the tiny sting of sarcasm. Mrs Chiverton looked complacently lofty, and Bessie had not now to learn how necessary to her was the incense of praise. Once this had provoked her contempt,

but now she discerned a certain pathos in it—she had learnt what large opportunity the craving for homage gives to disappointment. “ You cannot fail to do some good because you mean well,” she said after the perusal of more letters, more papers and reports. “ But don’t call me heartless and unfeeling because I think that distance lends enchantment to the view of some of your pious and charitable objects.”

“ Oh no ! I see you do not understand their necessity. I am busy at home too. I am waging a crusade against a dreadful place called Morte—and a cottage warfare with our own steward. These things do not interest Mr Chiverton, but he gives me his support. I tell him Morte must disappear from the face of the earth—but there is a greedy old agent of Mr Gifford’s, one Blagg, who is terribly in the way. Then I have established a nursery in connection with the school where the mothers can leave their little children when they go to work in the fields ”——

"Do they work in the fields hereabouts?"

"Oh yes—at hoeing, weeding and stone-picking; in hay-time and harvest. Some of them walk from Morte—four miles here and four back. There is a widow whose husband died on the home-farm—it was thought not to answer to let widows remain in the cottages—this woman had five young children, and when she moved to Morte Mr Chiverton kindly kept her on—I want her to live at our gates."

"And what does she earn a day?"

"Nine-pence. Of course, she has help from the parish as well—two shillings a week, I think, and a loaf for each child besides."

A queer expression flitted over Bessie's face; she drew a long breath, and stretched her arms above her head.

"Yes, I feel it is wrong—the widow of a labourer who died in Mr Chiverton's service, who spends all her available strength in his service herself, ought not to be dependent on parish relief. I put it to him one day with the

query why God had given him such great wealth ? A little house, a garden, the keep of a cow, a pig, would have made all the difference in the world to her, and none to him—except that her children might have grown up stout and healthy, instead of ill-nurtured and weakly. But you are tired. Let us go and take a few turns in the winter garden. It is the perfection of comfort on a windy, cold day like this."

Bessie acceded with alacrity. Castlemount was not the building of one generation, but it owed its chief glories to its present master. Mr Chiverton had found it a spacious country mansion, and had converted it into a palace of luxury and a museum of art—one reason why Morte had thriven, and Chiver-chase become almost without inhabitant. Bessie Fairfax was half bewildered amongst its magnificences, but its winter-garden was to her the greatest wonder of all. She was not, however, sufficiently acclimatised to an artificial temperature

to enjoy it long. "It is delicious, but as we are not hot-house ferns, a good stretch over that upland would be, perhaps, more delicious still—it is cold but the sun shines," she said after two turns under the moist glass.

"We must not change the air too suddenly," Mrs Chiverton objected. "The wind is very boisterous."

"There is a woman at work in it—is it your widow?" Bessie asked pointing down a mimic orange grove.

"Yes—poor thing, how miserably she is clothed. I must send her out one of my knitted kerchiefs."

"Oh yes, do," said Bessie; and the woollen garment being brought, she was deputed to carry it to the weeding woman.

On closer view she proved to be a lean, laborious figure, with an anxious weather-beaten face, which cleared a little as she received the mistress's gift. It was a kerchief of thick grey wool, to cross over in front and tie behind.

"It will be a protection against the cold for my chest—I suffered with the inflammation badly last spring," she said, approving it.

"Put it on at once—it is not to be only looked at," said Bessie.

The woman proceeded to obey, but when she wanted to tie it behind she found a difficulty from a stiffness of one shoulder, and said : "It is the rheumatics, Miss. One catches it being out in the wet."

"Let me tie it for you," said Bessie.

"Thank you, Miss, and thank the mistress for her goodness," said the woman when it was done, gazing curiously at the young lady. And she stooped again to her task, the wind making sport with her thin and scanty skirts.

Bessie walked further down the grove, green in the teeth of winter. She was thinking that this poor widow, work and pain included, was not less contented with her lot than herself, or than the beautiful young lady who reigned at Castlemount. Yet it was a cruelly hard lot,

and might be ameliorated with very little thought. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor," says the old-fashioned text, and Bessie reflected that her proud school-fellow was in the way of earning this blessing.

She was confirmed in that opinion on the following day, when the weather was more genial, and they took a drive together in the afternoon, and passed through the hamlet of Morte. It had formed itself round a dilapidated farm-house, now occupied as three tenements, in one of which lived the widow. The carriage stopped in the road, and Mrs Chiverton got out with her companion, and knocked at the door. It was opened by a shrewd visaged respectable old woman, and revealed a clean interior but very indigent, with the tea-table set, and on a wooden stool by the hearth a tall, fair young woman sitting, who rose, and dropt a smiling curtsey to Miss Fairfax—she was Alice, the second housemaid at Abbotsmead, and waited on the white suite. She

explained that Mrs Macky had given her leave to walk over and see her mother, but she was out at work—and this was her Aunt Jane, retired from service, and come to live at home with her widowed sister.

An old range well polished, an oven that would not bake, and a boiler that would not hold water—this was the fire-place. The floor was of bricks, sunken in waves and broken; through a breach in the roof of the chamber over the “house” blew the wind and leaked the rain, in spite of a sack stuffed with straw thrust between the rafters and the tiles.

“Yes, ma’am, my poor sister has lived in this place for sixteen years, and paid the rent regular, three pounds a year—I’ve sent her the money since she lost her husband,” said the retired servant, in reply to some question of Mrs Chiverton’s. “Blagg is such a miser that he won’t spend a penny on his places—it is promise, promise for ever! And what can my poor sister do? She dar’n’t affront him—

for where could she go if she was turned out of this? There's a dozen would jump at it—houses is so scarce, and not to be had."

"There ought to be a swift remedy for wretches like Blagg," Mrs Chiverton indignantly exclaimed when they were clear of the foul-smelling hamlet. "Why cannot it be an item of duty for the rural police to give information of his extortion and neglect? Those poor women are robbed, and they are utterly helpless to resist it. It is a greater crime than stealing on the highway!"

"Do any of grandpapa's people live at Morte?" Bessie asked.

"No, I think not—they are ours and Mr Gifford's, and a colony of miserable gentry who exist nobody can tell how—but half their time in jail. It was a man from Morte who shot our head-keeper last September. Poor wretch! he is waiting his trial now. When I have paid a visit to Morte I always feel indifferent to my beautiful home."

Bessie Fairfax felt a sharp pang of compunction for her former hard judgment of Mrs Chiverton. If it was ever just, time and circumstances were already reversing it. The early twilight overtook them some miles from Castlemount, but it was still clear enough to see a picturesque ivied tower not far removed from the road-side when they passed Carisfort.

Bessie looked at it with interest. "That is not the dwelling-house, that is the Keep," Mrs Chiverton said. "The house faces the other way, and has the finest view in the country. It is an antiquated place, but people can be very good and happy there."

The coachman had slackened speed, and now stopped. A gentleman was hastening down the drive—Mr Forbes as it turned out on his nearer approach. The very person she was anxious to see, Mrs Chiverton exclaimed; and they entered on a discussion of some plan proposed between them for the abolition of Morte.

"I can answer for Mr Chiverton's consent. Mr Gifford is the impracticable person. And, of course, it is Blagg's interest to oppose us. Can we buy Blagg out?" said the lady.

"No, no! that would be the triumph of iniquity. We must starve him out," said the clergyman.

More slowly there had followed a lady, Miss Burleigh, as Bessie now perceived. She came through the gate, and shook hands with Mrs Chiverton before she saw who her companion in the carriage was, but when she recognised Bessie, she came round and spoke to her very pleasantly. "Lady Angleby has gone to Scarcilffe to meet one of her daughters, and I have a fortnight's holiday which I am spending at home. You have not been to Carisfort—it is such a pretty, dear, old place! I hope you will come some day. I am never so happy anywhere as at Carisfort"—and she allowed Bessie to see that she included Mr Forbes in the elements of her happiness there.

Bessie was quite glad to be greeted in this friendly tone by Mr Cecil Burleigh's sister—it was ever a distress to her to feel that she had hurt or vexed anybody. She returned to Castlemount in charming spirits.

On entering the drawing-room before dinner there was a new arrival—a slender little gentleman who knelt with one knee on the centre ottoman, and turned over a volume of choice etchings. He moved his head, and Bessie saw a visage familiar in its strangeness. He laid the book down, advanced a step or two with a look of pleased intelligence, bowed and said: "Miss Fairfax!" Bessie had already recognised him: "Mr Christie!" said she, and they shook hands with the utmost cordiality. The world is small, and full of such surprises.

"Then you two are old acquaintances? Mr Christie is here to paint my portrait," said Mrs Chiverton.

The meeting was an agreeable episode in

their visit. At dinner the young artist talked with his host of art, and Bessie learnt that he had seen Italy, Spain, Greece, that he had friends and patrons of distinction, and that he had earned success enough to set him above daily cares. Mr Chiverton had a great opinion of his future, and there was no better judge in the circle of art connoisseurs.

"Mr Christie has an exquisite taste and refinement—feelings that are born in a man, and that no labour or pains can enable him to acquire," her host informed Bessie. It was these gifts that won him a commission for a portrait of the beautiful Mrs Chiverton, though he was not professedly a painter of portraits.

After dinner Miss Fairfax and he had a good talk of Beechhurst, of Harry Musgrave, and other places and persons interesting to both. Bessie asked after that drop-scene at the Hampton theatre, and Mr Christie, in no wise shy of early reminiscences, gave her an amusing account of how he worked at it.

Then he spoke of Lady Latimer as a generous soul who had first given him a lift, and of Mr Carnegie as another effectual helper. "He lent me a little money—I have long since paid it back," he whispered to Bessie. He was still plain, but his countenance was full of intelligence, and his air and manner were those of a perfectly simple, cultivated, travelled gentleman. He did salaam to nobody now; for in his brief commerce with the world he had learnt that genius has a rank of its own to which the noblest bow, and ambition he had none beyond excelling in his beloved art. Harry Musgrave was again, after long separation, his comrade in London—he said that he was very fond of Harry.

"He is my constant Sunday afternoon visitor," he told Bessie. "My painting-room looks to the river, and he enjoys the sunshine and the boats on the water. His own chambers are one degree less dismal than looking down a well."

"He works very hard, does he not?—Harry used to be a prodigious worker," said Bessie.

"Yes—he throws himself heart and soul into whatever he undertakes, whether it be work or pleasure. If he had won that fellowship the other day I should have been glad. It would have made him easier"—

"I did not know he was trying for one—how sorry I am! It must be very dull studying law!"

"He lightens that by writing articles for some paper—reviews of books chiefly. There are five years to be got through before he can be called to the bar—a long probation for a young fellow in his circumstances."

"Oh, Harry Musgrave was never impatient; he could always wait. I am pleased that he has taken to his pen. And what a resource you must be to each other in London—if only to tell your difficulties and disappointments."

"Oh yes, I am in all Musgrave's secrets, and he in mine," said Christie. "A bachelor in

chambers has not a superfluity of wants—he is short of money now and then, but that is very much the case with all of us."

Bessie laughed carelessly. "Poor Harry!" said she; and recollected the tragical and pathetic stories of the poets that they used to discuss, and of which they used to think so differently. She did not reflect how much temptation was implied in the words that told her Harry was short of money now and then. A degree of hardship to begin with was nothing more than all her heroes had encountered, and their biography had commonly succeeded in showing that they were the better for it—unless, indeed, they were so unlucky as to die of it—but Harry had far too much force of character ever to suffer himself to be beaten; in all her visions he was brave, steadfast, persistent, and triumphant. She said so to Mr Christie, adding that they had been like brother and sister when they were children, and she felt as if she had a right to be in-

terested in whatever concerned him. Mr Christie looked on the carpet and said "Yes, yes"—he remembered what friends and comrades they were—almost inseparable ; and he had heard Harry say, not so very long ago, that he wished Miss Fairfax was still at hand when his spirits flagged ; for she used to hearten him more than anybody else ever did. Bessie was too much gratified by this reminiscence to think of asking what the discouragements were that caused Harry to wish for her.

The next day Mrs Chiverton's portrait was begun, and the artist was as happy as the day was long. His temper was excellent unless he were interrupted at his work, and this Mr Chiverton took care should not happen when he was at home. But one morning in his absence Mr Gifford called on business, and was so obstinate to take no denial that Mrs Chiverton permitted him to come and speak with her in the picture-gallery where she was

giving the artist a sitting. Bessie Fairfax who had the tact never to be in the way, was there also, turning over his portfolio of sketches (some sketches on the beach at Yarmouth greatly interested her), but she looked up with curiosity when the visitor entered, for she knew his reputation.

He was a fat man of middle-age, with a thin voice and jerky manner. "I had Forbes yesterday, Mrs Chiverton, to speak to me in your name," he announced. "Do you know him for the officious fellow he is, for ever meddling in other people's matters? For ten years he has pestered me about Morte—which is no concern of mine."

"I beg your pardon, Mr Gifford, it is very much your concern," Mrs Chiverton said with calm deliberation. "Eleven labourers, employed by farmers on your estate, representing with their families over thirty souls, live in hovels at Morte owned by you or your agent Blagg. They are unfit for human habitation.

Mr Chiverton has given orders for the erection of groups of cottages sufficient to house the men employed on our farms, and they will be removed to them in the spring. But Mr Fairfax, and other gentlemen who also own land in the bad neighbourhood of Morte, object to the hovels our men vacate being left as a harbour for the ragamuffinry of the district. They require to have them cleared away—most of these again are in Blagg's hands."

"The remedy is obvious—those gentlemen do not desire to be munificent at 'Blagg's expense—let them purchase his property. No doubt, he has his price."

"Yes, Mr Gifford, but a most extortionate price. And it is said he cannot sell without your consent."

Mr Gifford grew very red, and with stammering elocution repelled the implication: "Blagg wants nobody's consent but his own. The fact is, the tenements pay better to keep than

they would pay to sell—naturally he prefers to keep them.”

“ But if you would follow Mr Chiverton’s example, and let the whole place be cleared of its more respectable inhabitants at one blow, he would lose that inducement.”

Mr Gifford laughed, amazed at this suggestion—so like a woman, as he afterwards said. “ Blagg has served me many years—I have the highest respect for him. I cannot see that I am called on to conspire against his interests.”

Mrs Chiverton’s countenance had lost its serenity, and would not soon recover it, but Bessie Fairfax could hardly believe her ears when the artist muttered : “ Somebody take that chattering fool away;” and up he jumped, cast down his palette, and rushed out of the gallery. Mrs Chiverton looked after him, and whispered to Bessie : “ What is it ? ” “ Work over for the day,” whispered Bessie again, controlling an inclination to laugh : “ The tempera-

ment of genius disturbed by the intrusion of unpleasant circumstances." Mrs Chiverton was sorry—perhaps, a walk in the park would re-compose the little man,—there he was, tearing over the grass towards the lake. Then she turned to Mr Gifford, and resumed the discussion of Morte—with a warning of the terrible responsibility he incurred by maintaining that nest of vice and fever—but as it was barren of results, it need not be continued.

The next day the painter worked without interruption.

END OF VOL. II.



